PETER THE CZAR

KLABUND

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Sidney Jones

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BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY

HERMAN GEORGE SCHEFFAUER

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK LONDON

1925

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Made in the United States of America

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I

PETER is born.

The Don, the Dneiper, the Volga, the Oka leave their banks.

Mud goes wallowing over the fields of wheat and many people are drowned.

Winter flowers are broken in the stems and hang their heads.

The dormice pipe with fear. The wind gathers their pipings and blows them with bursting cheeks into trumpet-tones until these too burst with a screech.

The trees weep rosin.

Frozen swans go sailing by on dancing floes of ice. Their green eyes gleam like emeralds. Frogs drift by, their bluish bellies turned upwards. Their bodies are drilled by water-

beetles, that lie replete and dead in the holes, as in nests; their brown carapaces glazed with white.

Red snow has fallen.

The fox-glove blooms on the Valdai Hills in the midst of winter.

Fire fell from Heaven out of the hand of God. A thousand villages flamed. The young storks on the thatched roofs were roasted alive in their nests. The old storks went streaking into the clouds of smoke and soot and clapped their long bills loud and desperately—as though there were swords clashing.

They were seeking their enemy yet they found him not.

Their enemy sat in Heaven, asleep upon His throne of lapis-lazuli. He Himself was like unto a diamond; clear and transparent and glittering. His eyes were lighted sapphires; His heart a dark-red ruby. About His shivering shoulders lay a rainbow like a silken shawl.

Seven torches were burning around His throne.

During His sleep His stony arm had swept one torch, one star from the seven-armed candle-stick of gold. Hissing, crashing, shooting forth sparks, the meteor had rushed through the eternal void and had struck its red and blinded forehead thundering upon the earth—burning and wasting an entire landscape.

The Popes were preaching:

"Woe to them that dwell upon the Earth! The sun has become pregnant and has born a golden child. This child shall lash us with a fiery knout!"

A pack of wolves stands howling in front of the windows of the palace of the Preobrashensks.

The servants cross themselves.

They whisper:

"A wolf-child is born, the son of a wolf. His brothers have hastened hither to greet him."

An old she-wolf comes as far as the courtyard and yowls hungrily towards the windows of the first story. Natalia Naryschkina, the

Czar's mother, wakes from sleep. She holds her breath and listens.

No man dares to kill the old she-wolf.

"It is her child," says Potapoff, the old coachman who thinks and knows many things.

"If they kill her, we are all lost!"

The she-wolf is found the next day half-dead in a sentry-box by little, foolish Ivan, who is seven years old and Czar at this time. Ivan goes crawling upon all fours and barks fiercely at the she-wolf who stares at him considerately with weary, mournful eyes. She is licking a young new-born wolf whose eyes are still shut, but who snaps and bites when Potapoff the Coachman picks him up. Potapoff gives him to a she-dog to nurse and raises him carefully.

The sun comes sailing out of the clouds, and inspects his new son, inspects little Peter.

With limbs all twisted, with eyes besmeared, with his little fists doubled in front of his wrinkled old man's face, Peter lies in the cradle and whimpers like a young wolf.

He whimpers, he whines, because he has been born.

How warm and pleasant was that moist, dark hollow, which, contrary to his will, spat him forth into the light. The raw air makes him shiver. He had protested lustily, with hands and feet, against being born. The light blinded him. He had been like a bowl that had drunk hot red blood, nine months long. His whole body had been like unto a goblet.

He gapes with open mouth like a fish.

He is thirsty.

He cries.

The midwife lifts Peter and hands him to his mother, the Princess Natalia Naryschkina, who lies pallid amidst the blue and white-checked pillows that tower over her like a mountain range.

The midwife lifts the mother's breast out of her shift. Peter seizes the breast and his little fingers sink into it like claws. Then with closed eyes he begins to swallow, to snort, to grunt, like the young wolf at the dugs of the she-wolf.

The midwife stands with arms akimbo.

Natalia Naryschkina smiles.

Peter is so little and Russia is so large—what is to become of little Peter?

Ah! ah!

What will become of Russia?

Prince Galizyn comes on a visit, buttoned to the chin in his black surtout, as though he were going to a funeral.

"Well, Natalia Naryschkina, how goes it?"

She is forced to smile.

His spectacles are perched upon the point of his nose. They threaten to fall off—any moment. He is the only man in Russia who wears spectacles. When she is particularly fond of him she calls him by a pet-name: Old Owl!

His blue and watery eyes twinkle dully and uncertainly.

She thinks: This is Galizyn, the great lover. This is the way my lover looks. The lover of the beautiful Natalia Naryschkina. He is said to be the most cultured man in Russia. That is why I fell in love with him. He has

read Shakespeare and Dante in their own tongues. And I do not even command the Russian tongue. But I command—him.

She remembers how he looks in his shirt, wearing his spectacles. Like a bird. Like a certain bird. But what is the name of this strange bird?

Prince Galizyn, who feels that he is being sharply observed, moves uneasily in the wickerware chair which has been woven by convicts in Siberian prisons.

"What is the matter, Natalia Naryschkina, what's wrong with me?"

"Nothing, my dear, nothing . . . Go, take a look at the cradle—how do you like it? I have had it painted with all kinds of pretty animals: storks and swans and wolves—just look at the little barbarian. Whom does he resemble?"

Prince Galizyn strides majestically to the cradle.

And now she suddenly remembers the name of that bird: yes, he looks like a marabout.

Peter sleeps.

The Prince takes off his spectacles and puts

them on Peter's soft little nose which takes
dent from the steel.

Peter makes a wry grimace in his sleep.

The very image of the father, the father'
very image!

The watery eyes of the Prince shine wit
pleasure like murky pools in the sun.

She sighs.

"Ah, that Czar Alexei Michailovitch shoul
not have lived to see his son—how sad. H
was a good man."

"Certainly," the Prince assents politel
"certainly. But—a good man: that does no
say very much. We Russians are infinitel
easily moved in regard to good men, and w
mouth the word 'good,' like the Prussians th
word 'duty' and the Frenchmen the wor
'love.' The dæmonic nature of Fate is no
conceived by goodness and not mastered b
it."

"And God—is not God good?"

She rose on her elbows in the pillow
Anxiously she gazed upon his small lips.

"God is all-loving, all-wise, almighty. An
that no doubt implies still more."

She sank back into the cushions.

"Let me sleep" . . . She turned her head towards the wall: "You weary me—when you talk so much wisdom."

Once more she turned her face towards him:

"Prince—perhaps I shall not live very long. The birth of this wild little man-child—he weighed fifteen pounds and had already given me much trouble—has used me up. I have given him all my blood. He has sucked me dry like a little vampire. In my will I have named you as the vice-gerent of the realm. Take care of my three children, Prince. Ivan the Czar is weak-minded. Play 'ride a cock-horse' with him and blind man's buff. As to Peter I know nothing of him yet, except that he will be very wild, but as he is the youngest and has already caused me the most pain, I love him more than Ivan and Sofia together. But I would bid you to watch over Sofia, above all things. She is sixteen years old and already a woman. You will love her,—you need not deny it. I know you, and Sofia will be wise enough and vain enough to return your love. But she needs a firm hand."

She reached for the soft and slender hand of the Prince:

"I know this hand is small and frail. But what it has once seized it holds fast. Hold Sofia, hold Russia fast with this small hand." The Prince bent over the bed and kissed Natalia Naryschkina lightly upon the forehead.

Natalia Naryschkina was wafted towards Heaven on a soft evening cloud. The cloud seemed to be a swan, like the swans painted upon Peter's cradle. Majestically this swan moved his soft pinions. His eyes shone like green emeralds.

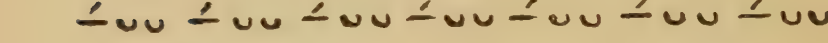
Wide open stood the copper portals of Heaven. At the entrance stood an angel in a fur of sable, with the white cap of lamb's wool on his head. He bowed low, his arms crossed upon his breast—like a serf. And a sleigh stood ready, with two winged dappled horses harnessed to it. It was ready to bear Natalia Naryschkina over the snowfields of Heaven to Him, who thrones upon the Polar Star, crystalline and unafraid like a mountain

of ice. His throne is of lapis-lazuli. His eyes are lighted sapphires, His heart a dark-red ruby which blazes through His diamond breast. In the cool red light of His heart all things melt and all things pass like snow in the wind of spring: Good and Evil, Hatred and Love, Joy and Pain.

Natalia Naryschkina was about to open her lips. But He was already aware of all that she had done, had thought, had desired. He took her will for consummation, and her evil deeds as though they had not been done. That she had deceived Alexei Michailovitch with— He did not reckon it against her. That she loved the Prince Galizyn: He was glad of this. In fatherly wise He drew her to His breast. How good that felt; this coolness after all that fever. This quiet after all that pother. Then she remembered her children.

With His stony hand He pushed the clouds asunder; and there upon the Earth beneath she saw her three children. Peter was sleeping in his cradle and was making faces in a dream. Ivan lay in a dog's kennel and barked. Sofia was looking over the shoulder of Prince

Galizyn, who was thoughtfully filing away at a Latin elegy upon the death of the incomparable Natalia Naryschkina. He beat time with his quill to the rhythm of the verses:



"These are dactyls. Or should one rather choose anapaests—what do you think, Sofia?"

Sofia looked down upon him helplessly. Dactyls? Anapaests?—what did these things matter to her? Were they serfs that one could whip, subjects that one could command? Oh, dactyls!—they rippled lightly and senselessly along like the waves of the Volga.

"I think, Prince, dactyls would suit poor Mamma very well indeed. There was something in her that glided and floated like these verses that you have just read to me and that I do not understand. But neither did I understand Mamma. When I shall come to die, you might try anapaests for your threnodies upon me. They sound harder, manlier."

The Prince:

"Are you then a man, Sofia?"

Sofia stares defiantly at his forehead.

Peter was trundled by in his baby-wagon.

He howled like a wolf.

The nurse cringed and drew down one shoulder in apology:

"He cries day and night, and cannot be quieted."

Sofia glanced at the Prince:

"Perhaps I shall succeed in silencing him—some day."

She went. The gravel gnashed under her hard, firm steps.

The Prince gazed after her with frightened eyes.

"This child has dreadful plans. Shall I be able to tame her?"

He looked up to Heaven, where Natalia Naryschkina lay upon the breast of the White Lord, and peered down upon him.

"Help me, Holy Natalia."

A tear dropped out of her eye.

Rain began to fall over Preobrashensk.

After two years Peter is overtaken by a sudden lameness.

His legs must be put in iron guides.

Potapoff the old Coachman shakes his head in dismay. The same thing is happening to Peter as once befell Ilja, the mighty son of Ivan the peasant, the hero of Kieff. For thirty years he was not able to move hand or foot and sat motionless in one spot. Until the strange pilgrim came to him one day and spake: "Stand up!"— and he was able to stand. "Walk!"—and he was able to walk. "Take this sword and fight against the brood of snakes and dragons." And he gave him the sword which the Angel Gabriel had once wielded against Lucifer. "Fight with this! But never speak your name to your enemies. Show your face but hide your heart under a coat of iron mail. Only the conquered man tells his name. Only the fool shows his heart. The hero fights nameless and heartless. He who speaks the name of his god before his enemies—delivers himself into their hands."

Thus spake old Potapoff, the Coachman.

"Peter may remain lame for thirty years. I do not fear for him."

Peter grew well just as suddenly as he had grown ill. And though formerly he had been a weak and delicate child, he now grew to be a young bear, who fought with Potapoff's wolf and bit him. Once Potapoff was forced to rescue the wolf from Peter's clutch. Or else Peter would have bitten a piece out of his throat. On the other hand Prince Galizyn one day saved Peter when Peter stood in peril of death. He found the half-witted Ivan at the bedside of the sleeping Peter. Ivan was holding a dagger in his hand. The Prince wrested the knife from him. He looked at it attentively. He wrinkled his forehead and pushed his spectacles from his nose as was his habit when he thought deeply. At length he remembered where he had already seen this dagger. In Sofia's hands. She had played with it and had pointed the knife at his breast—in play.

"You have stolen this knife from Sofia?" asked the Prince.

"No," said the idiot with an evil glance, "Sofia gave me the knife and so you have no right to take it away from me."

"Get out!" cried the Prince. He trembled with excitement, the spectacles tinkled upon the mosaic floor which bore the image of the last emperor of Byzantium.

The idiot slunk away with lowered head.

When he reached the door he turned and stuck out his tongue.

The Prince went in search of Sofia. He met her in the courtyard, just as she was returning from her afternoon ride. She sprang from her black horse, threw the bridle over his neck, gave him a slap with the flat of her hand and then let him trot alone to the stable.

She gave the Prince a light blow across the shoulders with her riding-whip.

He shrank under the blow. His soft, child-like face sought to grow stern and manly.

"Leave these childish tricks, Sofia——"

"Oh, Andrei, that was no childish trick. I I struck you only— because I love you. Do you also love me?"

She pursed up her lips like a dormouse. It was as though she were challenging him openly to give her a kiss.

The Prince grew angry:

"Yes, I love you too. Warmly. Passionately. But not to that degree of madness you seem to be bent upon."

He pulled the poniard out of his coat-pocket.

"Do you know this knife?"

Sofia paled slightly:

"Let me see it. Yes, of course. It is the dagger which I keep on the night-table beside my bed for my own protection. Someone must have taken it."

"Do not lie, Sofia."

Sofia gritted her teeth. She stamped on the ground.

"You have chosen a very peculiar cavalier, Sofia, one little worthy of you. His way of protecting you is very strange. What were you thinking of, Sofia?"

Sofia's mouth relaxed. She scraped her heel like a cock that is scratching for worms. Then she looked at the Prince and her eyes flashed. The gleam in her eyes frightened him.

"I love you, Andrei. You were the first to show me love and life."

The Prince stroked her right forearm which was covered with a leather glove.

"Perhaps, Sofia. But there is something else you love more than me—power."

"Yes," cried Sofia, rapturously, "yes, I love power. I want to rule. I want to be the Czarina. You shall be the Czar. The idiot does not concern us. But Peter stands in our way. Let him be killed, Andrei,—kill Peter!"

She burst into tears, sank at his feet and clasped his knees.

Ivan's mental malady had been declared incurable by a conclave of European doctors. A ukase of the vice-gerent, Prince Galizyn, proclaimed this to the people. The people, of course, saw in this only the plotting of a court camarilla and were loath to believe in Ivan's madness. Sometimes they saw the eighteen-year old lad walk behind the garden railings in the park of Preobrashensk—sedately, lost in dreams and in thought. His face, unnaturally pale, angelic and beautiful, shone above his starched white neck ruffle. The more his brain disintegrated and shed its petals, the

milder he became, he who had once been the wild and turbulent one, and finally the whole male and female servantry of the palace fell in love with him—they who had formerly made merry at his cost or had despised him.

"You see, my dear," said Prince Galizyn, "how you have been deceived. The fool is a far more dangerous rival for you than this bearish, fighting fellow Peter. Perhaps the idiot is even wiser than the sensible Peter. Perhaps even more sensible than we. Who knows! Well, what are we to do with Peter? Too bad, that he was not born a peasant."

"Well," returned Sofia, a trifle craftily, as she played with the amber chain, a present from the Prince,—which hung about her neck, "let us raise him as a peasant. That will be the healthiest thing for him and do him the most good. And how much learning do you think he needs as a future Czar? I too learnt nothing and yet I rule quite passably."

"Ah," said the Prince, smiling, "perhaps this ruling runs so smoothly because I have learned something? The future Czar must at least learn how to read and write. Or what

would Europe think of us?—Europe whose eyes are turned so expectantly upon us?"

The Prince's tone was full of a jesting yet pathetic quality.

Sofia wrinkled her forehead:

"Bah!—Europe. Her eyes are not turned upon us any longer. For she is a blind old hen. Yes," she repeated as the Prince burst into loud laughter, "Europe is an old blind hen.—Kiss me, Andrei!"

"And Russia?" He kissed her tenderly upon her unnaturally red lips,—"what kind of bird do you call Russia?"

"An eagle!" Sofia spread out her arms, like a bird of prey its pinions ere it swoops upon its quarry.

The Prince replied, speaking half to himself:

"Even a young eagle like Peter must learn a few things: not to fall out of the nest, how to poise himself safely in air, how to recognize his enemy from afar, and not to fear a death of sacrifice for his clan. These things must be taught him."

Sofia let her arms fall, petulantly:

"You are always talking of Peter. I think you love him and not me. Why don't you teach me how to fly!"

She flew to his arms.

II

A PRUSSIAN lieutenant, Felix Timmermann, who was no longer in the service, was appointed as tutor to young Peter. Peter learnt the rudiments of writing and reading. He also learnt how to speak German, but badly. He was never able to achieve a correct and grammatical manner of writing. But arithmetic and geometry came more easily to him. And as Timmermann was a gifted mathematician, he was able to help him considerably in this study. But Peter's favorite studies were military science, navigation and history, of which Timmermann himself had only a passable command. But Timmermann the tutor was always obliged to tell him of Hannibal, Caesar, of Alexander the Great. Timmermann, whose historical knowledge was based upon a very weak foun-

dation, saw that his pupil's imagination was fired by these tales, and began to decorate the lives of his heroes with all kinds of gaudy and phantastic accessories of his own. Alexander the Great, who had really begun to deserve the name of Alexander the Colossal, was able in the course of one history lesson to penetrate far beyond India and China, unto an imaginary land where the till then unconquered Nation of the Giants lived. Alexander with his own hand slew seven thousand giants and after he had dispatched the King of the Giants in a hand-to-hand fight, like a wild bear, he married the daughter of the Giant King. But she in the very bridal night by means of a poisoned shirt treacherously did Alexander to death—out of revenge for the destruction of her people. The worthy Timmermann had unconsciously got himself entangled in the myth of Hercules.

But Peter's eyes shone, his cheeks glowed.

"And?" he asked, fervently—"and"——

And so the worthy Timmermann was forced to heap climax on climax in his descriptions of more stupendous feats of heroism.

The mist lay thick over Preobrashensk, which Peter and his small court now occupied alone. The Regent Sofia and the Vice-gerent Prince Galizyn had gone to live in the city Palace in Moscow.

Peter stared out into the autumn landscape. He had become a big and burly fellow, and did not know what to do with his legs and arms. Sofia and Galizyn had allowed him to run wild.

He gnashed his teeth. O, how deeply he felt the hatred of his sister Sofia, how instinctively he knew it. But he would put a spoke in their wheel, call them to a reckoning when they least expected it. Their reckoning and his—were quite different. They simply kept on adding. But he was going to multiply, yes, raise things to a higher power. He was going to raise his abilities to the nth power. He was going to make something of himself—something like Caesar and Alexander the Great—even though they should try to prevent it and work against him. One day he would be called Peter the Great. But they—they would be known as Sofia the Little and

Galizyn the Tiny. Alexander had fought with giants. Were Sofia and Galizyn giants? Bah! —they were dwarfs. He stretched himself to his full height—he would be able to take care of them.

The bare trees in the autumnal mists outside waved their boughs like arms. They looked like skeletons, which danced and moved. The wind was playing the piper for their dancing.

Peter pressed his broad, red face flat against the panes:

"That tree over there would do very well for Galizyn—and that one for Sofia. If I do not hang them they will hang me. That is the way of the world. Did Alexander think twice when he struck off the heads of seven thousand enemies with his own hand?"

Peter raised his right arm like a sword—just then Timmermann put his head through the doorway.

"Just come here, Timmermann. I won't cut off your head. What do you wish?"

Timmermann carried two sabres under his arm.

"Come along, Prince. We'll start fencing

with sabres today. Let's go into the upper hall."

A number of French tailors came out from the capital. Peter was greatly surprised. They had been sent by Prince Galizyn. They took his measure for elaborate and magnificent festal garments of silk, damask, and satin and when he asked them for an explanation, they could only shrug their shoulders. His highness the Prince, had demeaned himself to give them these orders. As to why and wherefore—? —they regretted not to be able to give an answer, since they knew of none. And soon there also came a German master shoemaker who fitted him with beautiful shoes of morocco leather.

Timmermann proved also to be wholly without information. Peter made all kinds of conjectures, none, of which, however satisfied him. Was he to be officially introduced at some court-festival?

The tailors came again to attend to the fitting, with great vanity admired their own

handiwork and with many an oh! and ah! bowed themselves out.

Prince Galizyn came driving up one day in great state. He chose from among the new costumes the most splendid and beautiful one —of gold brocade and had Peter don it upon the spot.

He walked about Peter several times and eyed him critically.

"Like the hangman round his victim," thought Peter, "what is he up to?"

The Prince then bade him enter the coach. Timmermann, who was also arrayed in his dress uniform, sat behind. Potapoff drove. Now I am driving Ilja the great hero of Kieff. Hail! Reveal thy face, or hide thy heart under the gold brocade. The journey begins. Good fortune *attend* thee!

At Moscow, Sofia, clad in white satin, received him in the Kremlin. She stood at the top of the broad flight of steps. He saw her again for the first time since years. She came slowly down the steps. How beautiful she was. The Prince helped him out of the coach.

Sofia bowed before him. He blushed, grew bewildered and knew not what to say.

They drove to the Church of the Metropolitan in the silver coach of State.

Adrian the Patriarch received him, anointed him and blessed him.

Ivan had died.

At sixteen years of age Peter was proclaimed Czar. There he stood in the glaring blaze of noon on the terrace in front of the church and looked down upon the heaving mass of the people—which kept on throwing caps, flowers, shawls, jackets and kerchiefs into the air and crying:

"Long live Peter the Czar!"

Sofia took him by the hand and led him forward to the balustrade.

Then suddenly he grew aware of himself.

He broke away from Sofia, sprang upon the balustrade, threw his fur cap into the air and bellowed:

"Long live Russia!"

Sofia had staggered back.

The Prince swayed his bird-like head to and fro.

The Patriarch held his hands folded in prayer.

The people clamored and raved out of sheer joy.

Peter resolved that he would get to know this people.

Secretly at times, clad in the dress of a gardener's boy, he would escape from Preobrashensk.

He mixed among the ostlers, traders, peasants, workmen, strange sailors. From them he learned how to fight and drink, how to curse and how to seek for God and the Devil. He was strong as a bear. There were few who cared to tackle him.

He learned to know women.

His first love was a dirty, brown gypsy, who told him his fortune out of his hand.

"Little brother," she said laughing, "you have given me a silver rouble, but I'll tell you the truth in spite of this: You will one day be a great criminal, a big robber like Stenka Rasin, a big murderer like Ivan the Terrible. Yes, brotherkin, you will even be a murderer.

Think of me when that day comes. Poor little Peter, some day they will call you 'Peter the Terrible,' 'Peter the Possessed.' For you are possessed of all good and evil demons, of the holy and unholy ghost, of God and the Devil."

His second love was a young and tender creature of fifteen years, the daughter of a brandy tapster.

He loved her far too violently.

She was not able to endure his love.

She died thereof.

Sofia passed her hand caressingly over the forehead of the Prince. "You are getting wrinkles, darling. You must do something for yourself, for yourself and your fame, before it is too late."

The Prince shoved his horn-rimmed spectacles into place and shut the "Iliad" which he had been reading.

"Thank you, my dear child, for your friendly indication of my approaching age, but I'd rather read of warlike deeds than carry them out myself.

"What should an old man like me do with war and war's renown? Mars is only a typographical error for Mors. I am content to sun myself in your youth, in your fame. I believe in leaving action to youth."

But Sofia did not give up.

"Down there in the South somewhere there's a place called the Crim Tartary. A Khan who is subject to us and owes us tribute is said to have rebelled against us. You must go and crush this rebellion."

"A ridiculous notion, my child. Just let him rebel. Russia is so vast that it passes absolutely unnoticed. He or his successor will surely come to his senses."

Sofia pouted her lips:

"You have no taste for heroism."

"Oh, yes, my child, but not for useless heroism."

"Then I'll go to war myself. Do you think I could stand the strain of a campaign?"

She twisted one of the locks that hung at his temples.

"Moreover, you are getting white hairs, silver white hairs like a lamb."

The prince sighed:

"You'll give me no rest until this lamb is torn to pieces by the foxes of the Crimea. Very well then. I'll go and convert those Tartars."

"Timmermann," said Peter, "today is Sunday, the Day of the Lord, not the day of the vassals. I do not want to go to Mass and watch a dirty pope defile the holy vessels and pure liturgy of St. Chrysostom. I do not want to bend the knee hundreds upon hundreds of times in front of the gaudy ikons—as my father did, according to the legend. I want to stand upright before my God and say:

"Here Little Father, is Peter, your son. He will try to live and work in a manner not unworthy of thee. To work, Timmermann, do you hear?—to work. To cross one's self fifteen hundred times and to stand at Mass—I do not call that work. My dear Russian brethren consider laziness to be the virtue most beloved by God. But we shall have to beat this laziness out of them. Russia has need of artisans who understand their trades—whether of the

hand or the mind. And the Dvorianje shall also be forced to learn something at last—to ride, to fight, to lead. The other day my horse lost a shoe on the road. I was not able to find a blacksmith that could shoe him properly. I myself was forced to shoe him in a smithy. This blacksmith, however, was able to tell me the most amusing stories over a glass of kvass —stories of God and man that made me howl with laughter. But shoe a horse?—that was beyond him. That's the way with the Russians. They can do everything, only not the things they ought to do and must do. Our peasants don't know how to use the harrow and the plough, are unable to tell good soil from poor. They merely cultivate as much as they need for themselves and their families—when the harvest chances to be good. When a bad harvest comes, they starve and perish, of course, stupid and resigned to God. They sow corn in the forest and plant fruit-trees in oat-fields. Russia needs workmen, workmen, workmen. But not such as call themselves workmen, but such as really are workmen. Every man must work six-and-twenty hours the day, or Russia

will not develop. Russia needs a navy and sailors which know how to lead it. There the ocean lies—now open to all. We must learn from the Hollanders, Englanders, Venetians. Russia needs an army, officers and soldiers. Military service must be extended to all classes of the population. Prussia and France must serve as our models there. The whole Earth lies before us. Now we have only a loose horde of armed fellows, picked up anywhere and of these only a small part have guns—old rusted guns—which they don't know how to use—the most of them have only clubs, scythes and knives. Is there anyone that understands anything of strategy? At it, fellows! is the cry whenever there's a clash and thousands are sacrificed to it. Russia has a big population. But what can we do against Sweden? against Poland? against the Turks? the Persians? yes, even against rebellions, badly armed Tartars? Nothing, because we are nothing."

Peter had talked himself into a passion.

"My father chased the Jews out of the country. I consider that a grave mistake. They were the yeast in the Russian dough. They

were gad-flies about us heavy stallions. And it was a good thing too. They gave us no rest. They at least forced us to kick now and then. But now we have forgotten even that and go on dozing stupidly in the stables. But the Jews also had their heroes, Timmermann. Today is Sunday. Read to me out of their book of heroes, the Old Testament. Read to me of the Maccabees."

Peter threw himself upon a polar-bear rug on the floor and crossed his hands under his head. Timmermann stood at the high desk like a preacher at the pulpit and read:

"Then his son Judas, called Maccabeus, rose up in his stead. He put on a breastplate as a giant and girt his warlike harness about him, and he made battles protecting the host with his sword. In his act he was like a lion, and like a lion's whelp roaring for his prey, wherefore the wicked shrunk for fear of him and all the workers of iniquity were troubled, because salvation prospered in his hands."

And then Peter sprang to his feet and bellowed, bellowed like a young lion. He bellowed until the horses in the stables and the

serfs in their quarters grew restless and put their heads together.

And one of them, a greybeard of many years, whispered:

"If only he does not go mad, like Ivan! Like Ivan the Terrible, like Ivan the Idiot! Madness lies in the family, yes," and he nodded his white head, "madness and czardom—may be one and the same thing."

Then Potapoff, the coachman, struck him across the mouth with a wooden spoon:

"He bellowed night and day, even as a child, and could not be quieted. Nothing quieted him—no rocking, no singing, no humming of lullabies. And that is the way that Ilja the hero of Kieff, bellowed. He will surprise all of us yet. For Gabriel bellowed thus when he wielded his sword against Lucifer."

III

ONE day Peter, then nineteen years of age, entered the Chamber of the Council of State.

Sofia was presiding. She made a move to rise. He pressed her back into her seat.

He carried a small dagger on a silver belt and chain. This he drew and with one blow nailed the document which Sofia held in her hands to the oaken table-top.

Upon this document Sofia had signed herself:

The Autocrat of all the Russias.

"This document is invalid. I shall not give my consent to this farce. Is Russia going to be ruled eternally by women?—silence! Prince Galizyn—who carry on politics from the windows of their hearts? But I say a window must be cut into the wall of Russia that faces towards Europe. They have kept me stupid—

artificially. But I am not so stupid as not to see through your intrigues, Sofia. Prince Galizyn, the new Achilles—it makes me laugh. Just look at yourself in the mirror, Prince. The campaign planned against the Tartar Khans is an idle gesture. It will fail, because our nobles are arrogant and brutal, our burghers cowardly and treacherous, our peasants heavy and stupid. But I prefer them to the others, for their stupidity is full of something holy and trusting. They are stupid, as goats and oxen are stupid. But our knights are all of them Don Quixotes who would go and attack well-armed, war-hardened tribes with the old and dusty lances they have inherited from a long line of ancestors. Let us take up our task with humble and modest hearts—the task called Russia. Let us respect the smallest act that brings us forward, but let curses and ridicule fall upon the hollow head, the hollow phrase. He who carries a hollow head, let him at least lend it as a drum."

With his poniard's point he tapped lightly upon the Prince's head which was already growing sparse of hair.

Certain gentlemen suppressed a laughter that would have been unseemly.

"But all that, Your Majesty, is mere word-splitting——"

"But the splitting Prince, might easily be done with daggers. The splitting of a mere word has often had serious consequences. Just the difference of one syllable caused a poor devil to lose his head in old Byzantium. The Emperor had told his servitors: 'Off with the knave!' But they understood him to say 'Off with his head!' And they cut off his head—an act no edict could repeal. Think of that misunderstood syllable, Prince!"

Peter raised his head and jerked it thrice, four times in different directions.

"I disapprove of this campaign. I will have nothing to do with it."

He went out.

Sofia had grown pale.

The gentlemen of the State Council looked after him with open mouths.

Prince Galizyn closed his eyes, for he had grown dizzy.

The whole day a letter which Petrarch had

written from Mantua to his friend Andreas, concerning a syllable in one of his poems, went swinging through his brain:

"I am guilty of a great fault, guilty of using
A syllable which short I had employed as long."

The Prince began to study the art of war. He studied the battles of Hannibal, Cæsar, of Prince Eugene. He forgot that they had waged their battles with soldiers, not with undisciplined riff-raff, hastily drummed and whipped together.

He went forth against the Tartars, but the expedition came to a grievous end. The badly-armed Russians, unaccustomed to battle ran away from the cross-bow archers and spearsmen of the Tartars, although they were many times superior in numbers. As the Russians did not have enough trained artillerists the cannon were not even brought into action. A single gun went off—at the breech. And tore the gunners to pieces.

In order to reassure Sofia, the Prince sent reports of the most fantastic victories to Mos-

cow. Who was able to test their accuracy? No one.

"The whole plain is as thickly covered with corpses as the heaven with stars," he wrote to Sofia. But he did not write that they were the corpses of the Russians. "We have carried off the victory, taken the fortress of the enemy, captured the Khan, punished the rebels."

Sofia commanded all the bells in Moscow to be pealed.

Prince Galizyn made a pompous entry as the victor over the Cossacks of the Crimea and the Tartars. The victorious troops which he required for his triumphal possession he had assembled at some distance from Moscow. There was among them not a single soldier that had fought in the Crimea. The inglorious warriors of that campaign had perished—Tartar arrows, hunger and pestilence had swept them to death.

The truth leaked through very slowly.

Peter heard of it through Potapoff, his coachman. Potapoff had a nephew in the expedition and this nephew had escaped with his life.

Sofia never learnt the truth. She ordered bronze tablets with the names of the glorious slain to be erected in the cathedral of Moscow —in memory of the unforgettable Crimean campaign which had covered the ever-victorious Russian arms with new, fresh and imperishable laurels.

Peter had Potapoff's nephew brought to him and conversed with him in secret. He was a slender, remarkably handsome young fellow, a baker of *pirogges* by trade and his name was Menschikoff.

Peter pulled him out of sight behind a bush of syringa.

He drew him to him and kissed him.

"What is your Christian name?"

"Alexander."

"Like Alexander the Great. I'll make you great as he was, you too shall be called Alexander the Great. Stay with me. Be my friend. I love thee!"

The eighteen year old lad was a little confused by this unexpected outburst of tender-

ness on the part of the young Czar. But he returned his affection.

He was then asked to give an unvarnished account of the whole course of the so-called Crimean campaign.

When Prince Galizyn, the renowned conqueror of this Crimean War, asked for an official audience with the Czar, Peter refused to receive him. He sent Menschikoff whom he had appointed as his valet-de-chambre, to the Prince, and bade him say that he declined his report with thanks. The flying wanderer to the moon had been with him and had told him of his flight thither and how one got there. It was done by tying a thousand birds together and then tying one's self to the cords. He, Peter, was sufficiently well informed as to conditions on the moon and conditions in the Crimea, which could not well be much otherwise, interested him no longer.

Peter picked out a thousand sturdy and intelligent young fellows from the neighborhood of Preobrashensk and began to drill with them

on his own accord. He had obtained a manual of the Prussian drill through Timmermann and followed it closely. He had the thousand men swear fealty to him unto death. He appointed Menschikoff, whose remarkable good looks were accompanied by a most uncommon intelligence, as his adjutant. Menschikoff now took part in the instructions which the German Timmermann and later on Lefort a Frenchman and Fresini an Italian, gave him, Menschikoff also slept in the same room with Peter. And at times they both shared the favors of Feodorovna, the kitchen wench, a plump and pretty girl.

The Strelitz regiment which heard of the formation of Peter's body guard, sent a deputation to Preobrashensk.

"Dismiss your bodyguard, Little Father!" Such was the demand of Colonel Zickler, "for it will get out of all bounds and cause you much trouble. If you need protection for your person, are we not here to defend you, Little Father?"

God protect me from my friends, which are also the friends of Sofia and of Prince Galizyn,

that glorious warrior of the Crimea, that new Achilles! thought Peter.

He had his bodyguard with Menschikoff at the head defile before the Colonel of the Strelitzers. The Colonel twisted his pointed beard and gazed disconsolately into the cloud of dust raised by the parade. This unwhipped cub really knew how to keep discipline! He won his respect. He envied him his thousand men and thought with mixed feelings of his own Strelitz regiment whose chief activity consisted in guzzling, wenching and dicing and whose officers could hardly tell a pistol from an arquebuse.

Peter ordered the deputation to be regaled with cabbage-soup, groats, fish and mead and sent them back to Moscow without vouchsafing them an answer.

When they were almost out of hearing distance, he discharged a pistol into the air and hollowing his hands bellowed after the Colonel:

"Greetings to Sofia!"

It was past midnight when Sofia crept

through the secret passages of the Kremlin to the chamber of Prince Galizyn.

She sat down upon the edge of his bed.

He had ordered a French bed to be brought for him from Paris, and French bed-linen.

He raised himself in bed. His night-gown was of silk and embroidered with colored animals, swans, wolves and foxes.

Gobelins covered the walls: scenes from the amorous escapades of the Greek Gods: Leda and the Swan, Zeus and Europa, Cupid and Psyche.

Sofia kissed the Prince upon the forehead.

"I cannot sleep!"

"Why not, my dove?"

She stamped upon the ground—as she had done that day in the courtyard at Preobrashensk.

"I cannot sleep as long as Peter robs me of sleep. One or the other of us must quit the field. I am still the regent. The Strelitzers are with me. And you?"

The Prince silently kissed her hand. He thought of the insult which Peter had offered him at the Council of State, and later, too,

when he refused to receive him after that campaign in the Crimea.

Sofia toyed with her slippers of Morocco leather and balanced them upon her toe.

"I'll keep myself in the background. The Strelitzers will march against Preobrashensk. His so-called life guard will run away at the first shot."

"Are you so sure of that?"

"I am and so is Colonel Zickler. The Czar has made himself disliked by his western ways, his liking for reforms, his intercourse with foreigners. Russia wants to sleep and dream. He is trying to waken her. Children that are waked from sleep, become unbearable. It will be easy to incite the masses against him. They will knock him on the head. Nobody will be to blame. I shall then rule forever."

Peter was playing the bombardier in the Park of Preobrashensk. He had a cannon of the latest French system set up under the poplars and was pounding away at the landscape. Boughs splintered and fell, poultry flew screeching in all directions.

He was black with powder-fumes.

A monk came striding down the gravelled path.

No one had announced him.

Only Potapoff had seen him and had silently let him pass.

"The strange pilgrim comes to Ilja the Hero of Kieff! His great hour has come."

Peter turned.

"What do you want, monk?"

The monk came closer.

His eyes held a masterful gleam.

He raised the crucifix.

Peter kissed it.

"Be seated, Holy Father——"

And he pointed to the caisson of the cannon.

The monk shook his head.

"Petruschka" — and his voice took on a gentle ring, as though it were anointed and full of unction,—"Petruschka, what seest thou in my eyes?"

Peter looked up.

"Tears," he said softly.

"Yes, tears—tears for thee—tears for our beloved Russia. What dost thou permit evil

men to do with thee? Thou wastest thy young life with wanton frivolities, with fool's wars and dog's weddings. Thou shootest into the air, and art fain to believe God will answer thee with his thunder. But God sits upon his throne of lapis-lazuli and does not hearken to thine insolent noise, because he contemns thee. Seven pillars of precious stone are erected about him: Chalcedony, the Pillar of Mercy, Onyx, the Pillar of Purity, Hyacinth, the Pillar of Humility, Beryl, the Pillar of Wisdom, Jasper, the Pillar of Love, Emerald, the Pillar of Faith. There is no pillar but thou, hadst thou found it upon Earth, wouldst have overthrown. Thou squanderest the love of thy heart on harlots and favorites, every night thou art drunken like a very beast, and blasphemest God and his pious servants. Didst thou not lately in the midst of thy drunken cronies, dare to depose the Patriarch, the head of our holy church, from his God-appointed office, and to mount the sacred chair thyself? Didst thou not, being full of wine, read a black mass and mock at the holy institutions in a drinking bout with thy whores and favorites? The Holy

Trinity that thou bowest down to—is it not Vodka, Kvass and Mead? Who rules the realm in the meantime? Corrupt Diaks, vain Boyars who pull the skins off the back of their own serfs and violate Russia's daughters as though they were she-dogs. Thou art surprised, Petruschka, that the Strelitzers have started a conspiracy against thee. But, my son, I should cease to wonder and learn from mine enemies —when they are in the right."

Peter threw the linstock on the ground. It carried several flowers with it and buried them in the soil.

"I thank thee, Little Father, for thy good and well meant advice. Thou hast touched my heart and hast aroused my reason. I shall have the Strelitzers hanged in good time and shall try to serve Russia more eagerly than ever. As a reward for thy frankness, monk, thou shalt have a present from me."

The monk raised his hand in protest.

"No, no, I insist, my pious Father, you merit equal frankness on my part."

He stepped up to him, and with a sudden movement pulled the right hand of the monk

from under the cassock where he had kept it concealed.

A dagger fell to the earth.

The monk grew pale.

Peter picked up the dagger.

He regarded it carefully. He pondered as to where he had already seen this weapon. This handle of ivory, Venetian work, appeared familiar to him. Ah, yes, it had been Sofia's.

Peter smiled.

"I suspected that the Strelitzers and—well never mind—that the Strelitzers had sent thee to murder me."

The monk closed his eyes. He tried to find inner light. But everything was dark there as in some underearthen cave.

He opened his eyes and was pained to find that the light of day was still all about him and there in its centre, this peasant-like monster:

"What I have done, I did of my own free will, at no one's bidding, at no one's pay. I did it out of the fullness of my heart, because I hate thee out of the fullness of my heart, and shall hate thee as long as this heart beats."

Peter scarcely listened to him.

"Very well. I'll have those dear friends and protectors of mine, the Strelitzers, hanged and quartered as soon as I have the power and the opportunity. I shall make thee a gift of thy life, so, that thou canst go and foretell them the fate that lies in store for them. But thou shalt not go quite free of punishment. Pull off that cassock of thine. That sacred garment must not be defiled or degraded."

The monk took off his cassock.

Peter lifted up the leather knout which hung at his belt and brought it down whizzing upon the naked skin of the monk's back.

The monk stood upright and silent, without wincing.

When blood began to show, Peter stopped. He helped the monk put on his cassock.

"Bless me, Holy Father!"

And Peter, a trifle awkwardly patted him tenderly upon the rough cheek.

"Some day when I require a brave and honest priest and no mere friar, I'll call for thee. What is thy name?"

The monk bowed low: "Golovin."

IV

PETER invited Dutch and English sailors, French officers, German merchants and artisans to Russia. Fine people, good people, clever people—these Germans. They had manners and morals, slow deliberate movements, their passions were duly weighed against one another according to debit and credit. They dressed themselves in simple, decent garb, not in screaming colors, raspberry red, poison green and sulphur yellow all thrown together—like the motley Russian. They are a grey sort of people, dressed in the honest Prussian colors, black and white. They know only black or white, day or night, good or bad, this thing or that thing. It is clear that they despise some of these Russians from the depth of their hearts. They are always bent

upon clear decisions. No mistiness, no hiding or veiling of actualities—no twilight or fog such as hangs over Moscow in the long winter evenings. The workmen, the blacksmiths, the gardeners, the painters—all are horrified at the clumsy wood architecture of the churches with their onion-shaped cupolas. "No doubt the god-forsaken Jews brought you this architecture. Why it makes one's eyes water. These temples make one shriek. 'Tis well that you have chased the Jews to the Devil. And now we've got them. In Germany. What shall we do with them, eh? One or two may be burned as magicians, a few may be hanged as usurers, but a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand?"

Protestant sobriety and clear definiteness reign in the land of the Germans. Their houses of God are built of stone, bare, void of ornament, but made to last for half an eternity. These painted Russian barracks of wood, gaudy as the booths of jugglers at market-fairs, seem made to blow over with a breath. When a storm comes, they go flying up to God with the whole congregation, unless

they go smashing to pieces beforehand or simply crumble away in rottenness. We'll put a bit of order into this chaos, think the Germans. Peace and order. Those are the things for which we are known and respected in the world. Peace and order at every price. Even at the price of realities.

They are patriotic at times, these Germans, and when they speak of Germany they are fain to use mouth-filling words. And moreover, they do this in French. Queer ducks, these Germans. They understand all languages of the world—except their own.

Peter commanded his Waywodes and Boyars in fifty governments to send the most beautiful girl from their circles of the nobility to Moscow. He lined them all up in the white hall of the palace—like a row of soldiers. Then he paced slowly down the length of the line. Here and there he stood still, chucked this one in the cheek, or fingered the breast of that one. Others he would pull by their long blonde braids, and he even knelt upon the floor to test foot and ankle. He appears to think he is in a

stable of brood-mares. He sniffs the air. Jevdokia Lopuchin seems to have the most agreeable odor. He chooses her.

His wedding is like that of a rich peasant. He inspects everything—even the sheaves of rye that serve as underlay of the bridal bed.

During the feast which consisted chiefly of pig's head, in raspberry sauce and puree of pheasants, Jevdokia's magnificent blonde hair was combed at table by two maids with golden combs and woven into two long braids.

Peter himself, already slightly inebriated, laces the bridal crown upon her head. Six ropes of pearls hang from it as low as her breasts.

"Drink!" Peter cries, "drink! You will be acting like patriots! Brandy is a monopoly of the Czar."

Hand in hand, Peter and Jevodkia stepped upon the consecrated carpet.

The pope, who is also a trifle drunk, is supported by two servants on the left and the right, so that he should not fall over. He blesses the illustrious couple.

Peter and Jevdokia drink out of one glass, as a sign of a single household.

The glass falls and is shattered.

All the guests are full of consternation.

But Peter rises to the occasion.

He crushes the fragments under his heel.

"So may it fare with all that seek to sow dissension between us!"

Women and girls throw hemp and flax-seeds upon Peter and Jevdokia.

Before Jevdokia ascends the bridal bed, she is bathed in milk and wine.

The day following all are sick and sour at the gorge. Menschikoff totters about. Timmermann cannot see out of his eyes. The pope, who had been sought for late the evening before, is pulled from under the bridal bed, half-unconscious.

Jevdokia is very pale.

Only Peter is cheerful and full of good humor.

He is seated at a table which is covered with sour gherkins and peppered mutton. He lifts a great beaker of kvass.

He guzzles and crams and slaps his thighs with pleasure.

And then he takes a hot bath.

Red hot stones are thrown into a big tub. Peter leaps out of the hot water, runs into the snow outside, wallows in it like a snow-rabbit and then plunges once more into the hot water.

The lake of Pereiaslavel is covered with a sheet of ice. Far out, hidden by snow-clouds, and frozen fast, lies Peter's ship on which he has been cruising during the summer.

It is not much larger than a yacht and its name is "Ivan the Terrible."

Peter, clad in high boots, goes stamping over the ice.

He climbs aboard the ship.

Leaning his hot forehead against the icy mast, he stares into the whirling snow.

So standing, he falls asleep.

When he awakes, he can scarcely loosen his fingers. They have been frozen to the mast.

He tears them loose, though they bleed.

He descends into the cabin.

There lie his copy-books with geometrical and naval calculations.

He sits down in front of them and stares at them.

He begins idly to trace curves and lines.

The pretty head of Jevdokia Lopuchin emerges from the curves and lines. As soon as he is aware of this he crosses it out with two swift strokes.

Then he goes on with his sketching: Fantastic lines, frontiers, rivers, mountain-chains, oceans: an imaginary Russia that extends far unto China and from the Black Sea unto the White Sea as far as Finnland.

"I need ships, a hundred, a thousand ships, a whole fleet. I'll build them, I must build them."

"Poor little Ivan, thou Terrible one, no one would feel fear or terror at sight of thee!"

The pond of Pereiaslaval no longer suffices Peter for his piratical cruises.

He has "Ivan the Terrible" transported to Archangel.

The Dutch sailors call the old-fashioned tub

"Ivan the Cripple" and swear that it will not sail or roll a single sea-mile in the waters of the White Sea without foundering like a leaky barrel.

Peter determines to pay a visit to the Cloister of Solowezky which is on an island and to pay his respects to the bones of the saints interred there.

"Ivan the Terrible," horribly lurching to and fro like a drunken tar, reaches the little island harbor with the utmost difficulty.

A storm comes up on the return voyage.

"Ivan the Terrible" begins to spin like a top.

Peter is desperate.

He falls upon his knees.

He weeps.

He beats the sailors.

He kisses them.

He prays.

He promises the Lord Jesus Christ a cross if he will save him from shipwreck. He promises to appoint him a Russian Rear-Admiral.

"Ivan the Terrible" is hurled upon the coast and shattered to pieces.

Peter and the sailors are washed upon the shore like dead fish.

Peter hews a wooden cross with his own hands and erects it upon the shores of the Unsky Bay so that ships may see it from afar. He graves this inscription upon it, in the Dutch language:

"Das Kruys maken Kaptein Piter a. d. 1694."

The summer nights of the North were blue, warm and light.

They had captured a ship laden with wine from the South. They rolled the casks across the decks, drank deep and sang.

Peter screamed at the moon. He flourished a rapier and wanted to pierce the moon with it.

Menschikoff rolled like a porcupine across the deck. Peter and Menschikoff embraced and called each other endearing names.

A game of tug-of-war was decided upon.

Peter assumed command of the one, Menschikoff of the other team.

When the rope stood still and neither side could change the balance, they let the rope

drop and began to assail one another with fists, hooks, clubs and spars. Blood flowed, and a young sailor was killed. He was the darling of the whole crew, and a special favorite of Menschikoff's. Menschikoff howled like a woman. And all were suddenly sober.

Four sailors take a sail, roll the corpse within it and whilst a salute is fired from a piece and the crew stands at attention, they lower the body into the sea.

Menschikoff sinks fainting into Peter's arms. But he shakes him off as does a wind-whipped bough a caterpillar.

After all had long been asleep, Peter still drank by himself. He sang, until his roars of laughter choked his voice:

"Ha! beheading, village-sacking,
Hanging, burning, breaking, racking,
Grant us such a jolly game,
Cutting-off of ears and noses,
This no less to joy disposes,
But it is not quite the same."

Peter fought with the moon, scolded the

stars, cursed heaven and earth, until he lay taut as a wine-skin on the floor.

The next morning it was necessary to throw bucket upon bucket of sea-water over him until he awakened and came to himself.

He called for the young sailor.

They looked aside and were abashed and silent.

Then like a slow, damp snail, remembrance came crawling upon him.

He brushed his hand across his brow, threw up his head, so that the sun shone into his eyes, climbed the steps to the quarter-deck, hollowed his hands about his mouth and shouted to the whole flotilla:

"Clear for action!"

War was on against the town of Azoff, against the crimson crescent, against the Kalmuck, Tartars and Turks.

The Volga, the Oka, the Don are covered with little vessels, which float upon them like duckweed. Song ascends, there is clinking of bottles and there is laughter. At times two of the vessels ram each other. One or both foun-

der. A few men are drowned. No matter. Russia has plenty of that kind. Others are fished out—amidst shouts and roars of laughter. The journey proceeds. Down stream. Towards the sea. The sea that is still in the power of barking hell-hounds, but which will one day serve the Russian bear.

Azoff defends itself gallantly.

Peter and Menschikoff carry on the siege like a sum of arithmetic at school. But the sum cannot be solved. They have reckoned without their enemy.

Peter discovers that he can depend upon no one save himself and at the best upon Menschikoff. Whilst Peter is mounting guard in the foremost trenches at night, his soldiers are deserting by the dozen to the rear. He has children to deal with, children that play at soldiering and who weep when things get serious and howl at mere bruises. Many of his best men have fallen. Menschikoff considers the idea of an attack by storming. He wishes to fill the fellows full of schnapps to infuse courage into them, and then set them at the enemy. Peter rejects the plan. Gnashing his

teeth he gives up the fight. He is beaten at Azoff, just as Prince Galizyn in his day in Crim Tartary.

"Azoff can be taken only from the sea. I was an ass to try it by land. I need ships, regular warships. The nobility will have to raise funds for the construction of four-and-twenty big warships, the merchant classes for the bomb sloops and fire-boats. Hadrian the Patriarch will have to give us church treasure for the flag-ship. Why should arrows and spears of pure gold be sticking in the body of Saint Sebastian? Why should red rubies be burning in his wounds? Red glass would do just as well. And even his tortures are arrayed in pearls and diamonds!"

Whilst the bells of Moscow are ringing the Te Deum, the hammering and pounding of the ship-wrights are heard upon the wharves of Voronesk. Gigantic forests of oak grow near Voronesk and rich mines of iron are also found there.

Peter himself fells trees, planes beams, hammers, heats iron.

May of the year following sees the navy

slipping from the ways; it is manned in part by Hollanders, in part by Germans.

This time there is no singing, no clinking of bottles, no laughter when the fleet heads for Azoff.

Ghostly vessels slide silently through the fog.

Peter stands in the bow of his flagship "Ivan" dressed in the blue blouse of a sailor:

"Jesus Christus, not in vain have I made thee an Admiral in my fleet. Now prove to me what thou canst do. Help me and all men of the true faith against the heathen Osmanli. Let Azoff fall into my hands and I will nail them to the cross, as Thou wast once nailed to the cross."

Azoff fell in the year 1696.

Peter ordered the Khan and his two leading generals to be nailed to the cross like Christ and the two thieves.

Peter himself thrust the spear into their sides.

A Russian warship frightened the Turks by appearing in front of Constantinople upon a mission extraordinary.

V

PETER had a seal made for himself with this device: "I know nothing. I can do nothing. I want to know all things. I want to be able to do all things. He who teaches me shall be welcome."

"Europe shall be my teacher," was his thought. "And there is much that can be done in Europe and through Europe. Would it not be possible to create a European solidarity against Asia? An alliance with Venice and the Habsburgs against Tartars, Turks and Persians?"

Peter's tour over the Continent aroused the liveliest interest throughout Europe. For the first time the fabulous barbarians of the Volga and the Valdai Hills made their actual appearance. The journey sometimes resembled a Greek tragedy: it aroused fear and horror, sometimes it was like a comedy of Molière, the

title of which might have been: "The Grand-Duke on his Travels," sometimes again it was like an Italian mummery, or a coarse peasant's frolic after the manner of Breughel.

The Russians wore caps of fur an ell in height, and even in the heat of summer the thickest furs. They lugged countless holy ikons about with them, weighing many pounds and they made their devotions in front of these every few moments. On every passing occasion they would cross themselves three times, and this crossing soon grew to be a comic fashion in Europe. All Europe began to cross itself—and finally before the Russians themselves. At state dinners they conducted themselves in most unmannerly fashion. They took the meat from their platters with their hands, stuck it on the forks and then conducted these to their mouths. Most of them had no inkling of the use of beds. When such were placed at their disposal, they threw out the mattresses and slept inside the bedsteads on the naked floor. They were none too particular where the lives of their fellow-men were concerned. Even the slightest offence was instantly threat-

ened with death, and it was clear that no special weight was placed upon this threat nor upon its carrying-out, either. There were surely enough people on Earth. One more or one less—*nitschero.*

The Russians proved themselves most shabby, stingy and petty in the "guest-gifts" which they had brought with them. Whilst they were received everywhere in a most munificent manner and with an open-hearted hospitality that stinted nothing, they expressed their thanks by the gift of a few pounds of rhubarb of which they carried many hundred-weight with them and a few skins of the black fox or the sable, worth a few roubles. The gift of an ermine fur was regarded as something most uncommon and exceptional. Peter bestowed it only twice: once upon the Queen of Holland and once upon a charcoal-burner's lass who had let him have his will of her.

Sometimes Peter travelled incognito as Peter Alexeiivitch Michailoff.

At Riga he tried to play the fool in order to be able to inspect the Swedish fortifications,

but he was discovered spying by the Governor himself and chased away.

He growled to himself: "Some day I'll have a bone to pick with these Swedes."

At Königsberg he met the Grand Elector of Prussia and had himself trained as a master gunner.

He made compliments to the Grand Electress which caused her to grow red with shame and not knowing how else to counter them, she fell into a faint.

The same evening he was visited by Leibnitz, the philosopher. He regarded him from all sides like an ape who has been trained to tricks: to salute, to beat a drum, to crack nuts. He tore the periwig off his host's head and clapped it upon his own.

A philosopher must have a clear head when he thinks and speaks.

He had a huge bottle of schnapps before him: "Drink, Leibnitz!"

Leibnitz did not drink.

"You don't want to thin your blood?"

"As you command, Your Majesty."

"What words are these?—As you command?

Does a philosopher permit himself to be commanded? Or his thoughts, for instance? For what is the specialty of a philosopher? His thoughts, not so?"

"Assuredly."

"Well—can you command them like serfs—serfs of the body—or are they serfs of the soul?"

Leibnitz was embarrassed and turned his empty glass in the candlelight.

"The discipline of thinking must be disciplined in a Prussian manner."

The Czar screamed with laughter:

"Knouted in the Russian manner, Leibnitz, knouted in the best Russian manner! As to philosophy I will say only this: that I have seen how philosophy has been cultivated by the loftiest minds of all ages and all lands and that in spite of this there is not a single point to be found today which is not disputable and doubtful and uncertain. Descartes said that and he too was a great philosopher. Prosit!"

In Berlin a court ball was given in honor of the Czar.

The Grand Elector of Brandenburg led the Polonaise. The Czar led the Duchess of Mecklenburg, a delicate blonde. When the Polonaise had come to its end in the Hall of Mirrors, the Czar and his partner were nowhere to be found.

He had drawn her into a side apartment and had violated her behind a portière. And he was so powerful that she neither could nor would defend herself.

And then he left her. Breathing heavily she continued to stand in the darkness behind the portière. She shuddered from head to foot.

She did not dare to venture into the light.

She opened the window behind her, for the apartment was in the ground floor, and stepped outside.

The window faced the River Spree.

A boat rocked lightly upon the waves.

She sat down in the boat and looked down at the water.

Death was as black as the water and as cold.

Silently she slipped from the bow of the boat into the river and sank. Pikes played about her, perch and minnows.

But the Czar had already forgotten her.

He lay in his chamber, with his dirty boots in the damask bed, and planned how he might use the Prussians against the Poles and the Swedes. Upon a console over the mantelpiece a pair of porcelain lovers were dancing a minuet. He flung copper coins at the statuette until it was shivered to pieces.

Then he fell asleep and dreamed of a mouse of the steppes. She had a face like the Duchess of Mecklenburg and squeaked softly.

He bit off her head and flung the tiny carcase upon the fields.

Ravens that perched upon a bare willow stump, came flying up, fluttering and croaking and devoured the corpse.

Two days later the Czar went through the Valley of the Ilse and past the snowholes by the waterfalls and ascended to the Brocken.

The sun shone.

The birds sang. The Ilse rushed and roared.

A feeling of unutterable happiness overpowered the Czar and he sank in the grass under the crest of the Brocken.

Below him extended the wide land, the Ger-

man land, the Russian land, below him extended the whole Earth and even the Heavens were below him.

"Ah, to have a mountain like this in Russia! If I could remove mountains. I would have the faith. Such a mountain ought to rise out of the Russian levels. But they are flat like my thoughts and dreams."

The Czar spent the night in a charcoal burner's hut.

The daughter of the charcoal burner helped him to pull off his high boots.

In Holland Peter becomes a dock laborer upon the wharves of the East India Company. He wishes to work his way from the bottom up: Klaas Wilemzoon teaches him how to climb into the cross-trees, how to loose the sails, how to heave to.

His spare time he spends with Boerhaave the famous surgeon and takes lessons in anatomy. He dissects corpses, helps at operations, and finally learns how to conduct operations himself.

One day the corpse of a young Javanese

woman is brought to him to dissect. He throws away the knife and bursts into tears. He becomes obsessed of a mad passion for the dead beauty, has her embalmed and later takes her back to Russia with him.

Whilst he is sitting in the crow's nest or trepanning the skull of a dead child, a huge woollen doll is set up in his quarters and gives audiences in his stead.

The Dutch Jews who had been driven from Russia by his father, come to petition him to grant them leave to return.

The dummy is silent.

The Jews leave the presence, with floating kaftans, like lamenting birds.

The Russians gave great offence by having dancing girls and light of loves come to them from song-taverns and dance-places during the bright of day, and in thinking nothing of being seen on the streets with them.

Peter himself did not trouble himself much as to how he tackled a goose or any other kind of bird.

Every woman he met in the street who took

his fancy, he would address in Russian. If she did not or did not wish to understand him, he would smile and show her a Russian gold rouble: his customary imperial fee—a coin that bore his image. He was glad to present this portrait to young and pretty girls when they were complaisant to him. And they were more willing to take this portrait than if it had been painted by Franz Hals. One day Peter saw a young female net-mender upon the quays at Amsterdam. He wanted to buy her of her father. He was greatly surprised when it was made clear to him that women in Western Europe were not objects of sale and barter like the serfs of his own land. He remarked most graciously that he was in general very much disposed to Western reforms and had already introduced a number in his own land, but as to the question of the emancipation of women—that was something he would prefer to consider more than deliberately.

The reports which Peter sent to Russia were marvellous affairs, all furbished out and gar-

ishly painted for the benefit of the court and the people. He knew what he could and must serve up to his Russians in order that they should continue to hold him in respect. He ordered, for example, that a report be sent establishing the fact that Amsterdam was a city of over three million inhabitants and that it lay considerably closer to the sun and moon than did Moscow. Every inhabitant had three eyes, two that saw the present, one that was able to peer into the future. The eyes that were able to look into the future, had prophesied war and victory and glory for Russia. The most remarkable things which he had seen upon his journey and which—having bought them for a hundred ermine-skins—he intended to bring to his people were: the knife with which his holy patron Saint Peter had cut off the ear of Malchus, a piece of Jesus' crown of thorns upon which the hardened blood of the Son of Heaven was still to be seen, a painting of the Virgin, painted by the hand of Saint Luke himself, a fig-leaf which had been worn by Mother Eve, the point of Joseph's

mantel,—the very same he had left in the hands of Madame Potiphar what time he had fled so heroically from her clutches.

After the Russians had left the houses which had been placed at their disposal by the Amsterdamers, no human being was able to occupy them for weeks. They were more like sties than dwellings.

VI

PETER had just drunk himself righteously drunk at a banquet in Vienna, when he received word that the Strelitzers had openly rebelled.

He ordered a bucket of water to be poured over his head and was sober in an instant.

He succeeded in concluding an alliance of three years with the Emperor and with Venice, and to obtain a promise of neutrality in case Russia should become involved in European wars. And then he left in secret.

He travelled by way of Warsaw, where he had a secret meeting with King August the Strong of Poland, which led to the conclusion of an alliance against Sweden.

Peter went dashing in his sleigh across the mighty steppes. The moon scattered a greenish opalescent light upon the snow.

Peter whirled his whip.

The coat of the horse began to be stained with reddish streaks. Its flanks rose and sank like waves.

Peter breathed heavily.

"I must not come too late. Everything is at stake. My life! Russia! Run, little horse, run! run all you can!"

The tortured animal looked around several times during its despairing gallop. It begged for pity—for mercy. Peter held his hand before his eyes. He was not able to look into those of the horse.

"I dare not have pity upon him!"

Distant at first, then ever nearer, sounded the hoarse barking of hungry wolves.

Peter looked around him.

"See there, my wild brothers!"

Black shadows were flitting across the greenish snow.

The horse had also heard the howlings.

It reared up with its last desperate strength. Its nostrils quivered. It ran for another half mile, then blood broke from its mouth. It collapsed and sank upon its knees a few miles from Preobrashensk.

A curse clove Peter's lips.

The wolves had approached to a hundred yards.

"I must get to Preobrashensk, Lord in Heaven—I the Lord of Earth, must get there!"

He drew the pistol, tore the long reins from the horse.

He gave the animal a last pat upon the steaming flanks.

"Thanks, good beast!"

The wolves had come up. They smelled the fresh blood. Their dark-green eyes glowered at Peter and were full of hate.

Peter withdrew twenty, thirty paces.

The wolves fell voraciously upon the half-dead horse. It quivered at their teeth.

They had devoured it almost to the bone—when the thin reins, twisted to a noose came singing through the air.

Two of the wolves became entangled. The others scattered in all directions. They had sated their hunger—they left their comrades to their fate.

Peter came closer with the whip. He suc-

ceeded at length in harnessing the maddened beasts to the sled.

He swung his whip.

It was with a team of wolves that Peter drove into Preobrashensk the following morning.

Those who saw him, crossed themselves.

"The son of the wolf is here again," they cried.

A regiment of the rebellious Strelitzers was standing in the court yard of the palace. A spasm of horror went undulating through the ranks as they saw the wolf team come dashing through the wooden portal.

Peter sprang out of the sled and let the whip hiss through the icy air:

"Dogs! down upon your knees!"

The whole regiment sank silently upon its knees.

He went through the ranks, touching a man here and there with his whiphandle.

"Thou shalt be hanged—and thou—and thou."

"The regiment will be rehabilitated if it hangs every tenth man in the ranks."

And so they hanged their own comrades, and these allowed themselves to be hanged, silent and unresisting.

A deputation of boyars came to Peter:

"Show us Ivan—where is Ivan the real Czar? He is the holy Gosudar. He is not dead. Thou keepest him captive in the palace. He is still living. Where is he?"

Peter signed to the deputation to follow him.

They passed along dismal corridors; doors opened and shut of themselves.

Suddenly a heavy door of oak opened itself.

A chapel-like room grew visible into which colored lights shone through tinted glass.

In the background upon a throne of wood sat Ivan, pale, delicate, elegant, with that insane smile upon his lips.

The boyars fell upon their knees. Tears rushed into their eyes:

"Our Czar! Our Little Father! Hail!"

One of them crept up to the throne, sliding on sore knees to kiss his feet. His mouth watered.

He reached for the small foot.

And this fell to pieces like a piece of worm-eaten bark.

The boyar cried and shrieked.

The mummy of Ivan the Idiot was seated upon that throne.

Peter again motioned to the deputation.

They slunk behind him with drooping heads.

He ordered a gardener to bring him one of his large shears such as are used for clipping trees and hedges. With this and with his own hands he cut off their beards, the symbol of their ranks as boyars.

Red blood is flowing in front of the Cathedral of Saint Basil in the Red Place at Moscow.

Peter stands upon the scaffold beside the executioner and looks into the face of each traitor.

"Who art thou? What is thy name? Dost thou believe in God? Why didst thou not believe in me? Off with his head."

A head rolls before his feet—it has a familiar look. He clutched it by its black woolly

hair and lifts it to his face. It is the head of Colonel Zickler. Too bad. He should have remained among the living. He had a sense of humor. But the sword does not know whom it kills. Moreover no one dare think during the act of killing, otherwise it would never be done, or one would be killed one's self. The creatures of the Earth devour one the other. And if the astrologers and astronomers are to be believed then the stars also devour one another with fiery maw. The main thing is to have the largest mouth and to be the beast that eats and that is not eaten. That is the meaning of life.

Sofia, deeply veiled, falls on her knees before him:

"Pardon for the Prince Galizyn!"

"Sofia, my dove, I had quite forgotten thee —it is nice of you to remind me of your existence. Are you still living? A very terrible epidemic of deaths has begun. For whom do you entreat pardon—for your lover?"

"Sofia!"

"Your Majesty!——"

"Be honest!"

Sofia bends her beautiful head. He strokes her hair. "Too bad, that she should have been born my sister. She would have been the right wife for me. How beautiful she still is!"

Peter motions to the executioner:

"Prince Galizyn is pardoned—to run the gauntlet."

Tears course down Sofia's cheeks:

"Do not cry, my dove. Do not dim your shining eyes. Do not ruffle your white feathers."

Prince Galizyn falls dead in the middle of the gauntlet-run, a verse of Homer's upon his lips.

Sofia screams.

"Art thou still human? Did Natalia Naryschkina bear thee? Art thou not a wild wolf? Art thou not the Anti-Christ of whom the folk speak?"

Bashkirs and Cossacks had also joined in the revolt with the Strelitzers.

Golovin, the monk militant, had incited them to the Holy Crusade. He stood upon a hill, swaying his pale, ascetic face like a silver

standard and preaching to the people that lay about him terrace upon terrace.

"And I strode upon the sand of the sea and saw a beast rise out of it, and it had seven heads and seven horns and upon its horns it bore seven crowns and upon its heads names that were blasphemy. And the beast that I saw was like unto a panther, and its feet like the feet of a bear, and its maw like the maw of a lion. And the Dragon gave it great strength and power. And all the Earth was full of amaze at the beast. Whom is the animal like? And who can do battle with it? And it had a mouth wherewith it spake great blasphemies. And it opened its jaws to utter blasphemies against God and against them that dwell in Heaven. And it was given to him to contend with the saints and to overcome them. At his birth fire fell from Heaven and the rivers overflowed their banks. The poisonous fly-agaric bloomed and puffed itself out in the depth of winter on the Valdai Hills. Do ye know the name of this beast, that has broken like a wolf into the flock of lambs? That sucks the marrow out of the bones of Russia so that it may fatten

itself—see how big and bloated it is from gluttony! That betrays Russia to the Niemzy, to strangers. That prays to an idol that he has brought out of strange lands with him: I saw it lying in the dust before a hellish mummy, a woman with eight breasts, called Astarte. Do ye know the name of this beast?"

And then they all howled the name, with the thunder of twenty thousand throats:

"Peter the Norman! He is the son of Natalia Naryschkina and a wolf. She went a-whoring with a wolf, before she gave him birth."

Golovin drew all the rebels after him, after the cross. He swung it like a club. It was red with the blood of enemies slain. They were up in arms against the tyrant, against the fiend, against the Beast, against the boyars, against serfdom and tax-slavery.

But the rebels were dispersed by Peter's guard under the leadership of Menschikoff.

Soon rafts came floating down the Don. Gallows stood upon them. And on these gallows hung rebels. Their arms and legs dangled in the winds, their protruding eyes, their

gaping mouths from which the purple tongues hung down like dead fish, spoke a language there was no mistaking.

The Czar waded in blood and the legend went about that every morning he bathed in fresh hot rebel blood.

A procession of a hundred thousand, led by the patriarch Adrian and bearing before it images of the Czar and of many ikons, went winding to the Kremlin.

"Mercy for the sinners. Who amongst us is without sin?"

The Czar remained deaf.

Shuddering the people drew into itself like a snail. Hate smouldered hotly under the ashes of indifference. Golovin escaped the catchpoles, for the people worshipped him and hid him among themselves. Every night he slept in another house.

Ivan was dead. Golovin had seen the body himself. The people believed him. And so all the love of the people and all their secret hopes were gathered and centered upon the boy Alexei, the son of Peter and Jevdokia.

Sofia was taken to a cloister.

"Lady Abbess, lady Abbess"——

The nuns swarmed around Sofia like goats about a leader.

At vespers Sofia began to notice strange manners among the nuns.

Some of them clucked like hens as they prayed, some bleated, others mooed like cows.

At matins her eyes were fully opened.

The nuns used the sacred vessels of the chapel for unspeakable purposes.

One of them devoured dozens of consecrated wafers for breakfast—as though they were rolls.

Instead of love and praise of the Lord and Our Lady, they sang ribald ditties:

> "Since the Lord Jesus he begot
> The Holy Ghost's a man, I wot."

She fainted at the feet of the Saviour.

Peter had taken her to an insane asylum which had been arranged as a cloister.

From this day she never spoke again, and she died after three years, forgotten and forsaken by Peter, by God and the world.

VII

THE envoys of Poland and Sweden met each other at the court of Moscow.

"He is a barbarian."

"He is a genius."

"A barbarian genius."

"What will become of him?"

"Or of Russia?"

"Or of us?"

"He is a noble monster."

"A male sable."

"A glutton. He has a sound appetite. He will gobble up Poland."

"He will gobble up Sweden."

"He will gobble up Europe."

"When I asked him for an audience yesterday where do you think he granted it to me?"

"Well?"

"He bid me come to the harbour. He sat in

the crows-nest of a ship which he repaired and patched and he expected me to climb up the shrouds!"

"I have the greatest respect for him. He is not a king such as we are accustomed to in the West; elegant and full of whims, saying nothing, knowing nothing."

"He is the servant of his work. The smallest task is not too small for him. I saw him after a return from the hunt talking half an hour with a farrier. His horse had lost a shoe. He proved to the smith that his method of shoeing horses was unpractical and unprofitable. And finally he shoed the horse himself—and the farrier stood by and watched, and then clapped him on the shoulder and said: "Thou art right, Little Father. I'll take thee as apprentice any day."

"And the Czar?"

"Laughed his boyish laugh and said that if the smith would take over the throne of the Czar he on his part would gladly take over the blacksmith's shop. Then the smith scratched his head and mumbled things had better remain as they were. . . ."

"The other day a girl in the palace grew sick of a mortified leg. The Czar cut off the gangrened limb like a master-surgeon and bandaged it with rare skill and care."

"If we do not beware, he will cut off, not our legs, but our heads."

"Sweden must keep her eyes open!"

"Poland must keep her ears cocked!"

Peter came strolling along.

"Ha, gentlemen, whither away in such haste? Let us drink a drop of kvaas together, a drop of mead."

"Pressing matters of state, Your Majesty, unfortunately call me away."

"The courier for Warsaw is already waiting. I must not fail to give him my post. . . ."

Peter seized the Swede by the buttons of his coat:

"Have you any intelligence from Stockholm? How is the health of his Swedish majesty? He has been confined to his bed for some weeks, as I hear to my regret."

The Swede shrugged his shoulders.

"The physicians are full of hope."

Peter let the buttons go.

"How old is young Karl, his son?"

"Sixteen years, Your Majesty."

"Ahem!"

The envoys were dismissed.

Peter tittered as he looked after them:

"They are afraid of me. Afraid that their tongues will give them away. But I know very well, what plots they are spinning. They would like to keep Russia in the toils, far from the southern sea, far from the northern sea—asleep, dreaming—a good child.

"I'll tear that web to pieces."

Peter half naked ran about the apartment. His hairy leonine breast peeped out of the opening in his shirt.

He beat the wall with his fists, and began to beat the General March:

"Menschikoff, darling, little son—what hast thou done again? I have broken Nestaroff on the wheel, hanged Gagarin: canst thou not listen to reason?"

He stepped up to Menschikoff with tears in his eyes, and shook him by the shoulders:

"Little Son, boy of my heart, what shall I do with thee? I shall have to have thee beheaded. Thou wilt yet lose thy pretty and clever head."

He stroked his head delicately with his great paw.

Not a muscle in Menschikoff's face moved.

"Your Majesty has the power to do it. No doubt of that. But would Your Majesty remain alone in the State? We all steal and murder—some of us wisely, the other stupidly. Has Your Majesty enough money to pay the officials sufficiently? Well then? We save the state exchequer considerable sums in allowing ourselves to be bribed. . . . And I do not see why a judge who has successfully concluded a trial or who has concluded a successful trial should not get a gratification."

"My child, my little boy: thou hast taken money from a scoundrel—thou hast brought misfortune upon a worthy man."

Menschikoff shrugged his shoulders.

"God is unjust—why should I be just? I, a poor, weak mortal! Perhaps one gets rid of evil most surely—by doing it. . . ."

Charles XI. of Sweden died.

Charles XII. ascended the throne—at sixteen years.

Peter rubbed his hands, as though he were freezing:

"This little fellow comes precisely right. I still have a small score to settle with the Swedes,—since the days of Riga."

It is night.

A candle stuck into an empty brandy bottle illumines the room.

The Czar in patched slippers and in a shabby, dirty dressing-gown strides to and fro. The tassels drag on the floor behind him. He stumbles every few moments.

His eyes shine large and green like the eyes of a wolf.

"The Earth must be mine and the Heaven and the stars and the moon no less."

A crumpled map of Europe lay on the floor. "Russia—how small she still is! The Swedes and the Poles and the accursed heathen, the Persians and the Turks, are putting me in a strait jacket—so that I cannot breathe."

He snorts.

"This Charles of Sweden! A vain and impudent little fellow! He imagines because he commands a few thousand drinkers of cod-liver oil and gobblers of ice-bear hams, that he is able to fight with me. Laddie, laddie! if ever I get my hands on thee, I'll breakfast off thee—wash thee down with a few swallows of vodka. Ought I challenge thee to a duel, hey? —with crooked swords? Turkish swords? I'll spot thy charming white neckruff and thy sky-blue camisole all over with thy young red blood. Thou'll have to wear a baby's bib so as not to mess thyself up.

"The Pole is a womanish fool. He thinks he's got me—but I've got him. I'll send him a few pretty Tartar girls and then stir him up against thee, Charles, so that thou wilt have thy hands full. And then I'll come along and give thee the finishing blow—like a boar half-harried to death. Sound the mort! And after the Pole has bled himself half to death in fighting Charles, it will be *his* turn."

Peter trampled upon the map.

"Livonia, Esthonia, the Ingermanland must be ours!"

He trotted to a corner where a half-filled bottle stood in the shadow.

He raised it to his lips:

"Prosit! Charles of Sweden! Prosit! August of Poland! May the devil take ye both!"

He smacked his lips, threw himself upon his pallet, covered himself with his Cossack mantle and fell asleep.

He dreamt that he was attending the funeral of the two kings.

He threw three handfuls of Earth into the graves, swung himself upon the back of his dapple-grey and rode through Poland, Livonia, Esthonia to the sea.

The ocean foamed at his feet.

He tightened the bridle of his horse, which stood like an iron statue in the flood.

The salt wind combed his beard.

He cried:

"Ours is the sea, the Baltic, the Russian Ocean!"

In 1700 August the Strong of Poland marched against Riga, Peter against Narva.

Peter, the Man, was humbled in the dust by Charles the Boy.

Peter and Menschikoff escape captivity only by hair's breadth.

The Russians are surrounded and voluntarily deliver up their officers to the Swedes. Charles XII. in a spirit of scorn and pride, lets all his Russian prisoners go—after depriving them of their arms.

All Europe laughs at Peter. Satiric medals are coined, mocking his flight.

A boy, a child has tickled the Bear with a straw and the Bear scuds away for dear life.

Peter collects new forces, whilst Charles like an angry puppy engages in a biting-match with the Poles. Peter makes merry over the fact that Charles has let his prisoners run. This magnanimity will yet cost him dear. Just as dear as his cheap and easy victory. We have time, time, time. We did not take Azoff either at the first shot. Misfortune will become our good fortune; next spring—just as a gnarled willow stump brings forth new shoots. Had we been victorious, we would

have become high and mighty, lazy and insolent. This defeat will force us to marshal all our powers, to redouble our efforts, to spur on our ambition bloodily—like a young colt.

During the retreat from Narva, Menschikoff found a pretty Livonian maid in a house where they spent the night. She solaced him for his defeat and passed the night with him. Her name was Katharina.

Peter dreamed that he was riding upon a winged horse; a man with a sack marched along the road ahead of him. Despite Peter's efforts, he did not succeed in overtaking the man. He shouted to him from afar: "Hallo! Stand still!" Then the man stood still. Peter leaped from his rose: "Stranger! Wanderer! What hast thou in that sack?"

"Lift it, strange hero, you will then learn what it holds."

And Peter lifted the sack, but scarcely the thickness of a knife blade from the floor. So heavy was the sack.

And then the Wanderer whose face suddenly began to resemble that of Golovin

spoke: "All the woe, all the sorrow of the world is in that sack—thou canst not lift it. It was thou thyself that didst help to fill this sack to the very brim."

Then Peter knelt down before him: "Holy man, how can I learn to know God's will?"

Then the Wanderer spake: "Ride toward the Mountains of the North. Upon the highest of these northern mountains thou wilt find the World Oak. Under this World Oak there stands a smithy. Ask the smith after the will of God."

And Peter rode three days and three nights: the first day through heat of sun and great drouth, the second day through mist and rain, through hail and snowstorms the third. And there stood the blacksmith upon the highest hill under the World Oak and welded two thin hairs together—a blond hair and a black.

"Smith, what art thou forging? Art thou not that selfsame smith that could not shoe my horse what time I came riding home from the hunt and my horse had cast a shoe?"

"I am that smith. I weld Love to Love, and Hate to Hate."

"Whom should I love, whom hate?"

"Her father has no name. She lives in a province by the sea. She has been lying for five-and-twenty years upon a dunghill. She has an ugly body like the bark of a tree. Her parents are ashamed of her, the cock perches upon her body and crows."

Then Peter waxed wroth that he should love a girl that had lain upon a dunghill for five-and-twenty years and was hideous as night. He rode to the capital of the province on the sea, which he had never seen and which was to be called St. Petersburg after him and was eager to see and slay the ugly girl.

He came to a wretched hovel and tied his horse to the garden fence.

No one was at home. But there was a girl lying upon the dunghill in the yard behind the house. Her body is crusty as the bark of a pine. Peter draws his purse; from it he takes five hundred gold roubles each bearing his image and lays them as blood-money upon the dunghill. Then he raises his sword and plunges it into the breast of the girl.

Thereupon he rode out of the city. The

sound made by the galloping hoofs of his horse awakened him.

He rubbed his eyes.

Menschikoff unrolled an old Italian engraving: a naked woman, reclining in a most charming and tempting pose.

"Come, Katharina."

She looked over his shoulder.

"Look at this woman. Study her pose. You must lie on the couch in this way when the Czar comes. You must not move, but pretend to be asleep.

Peter drew back the curtain.

He started back in delight.

He crept to the couch, carefully pulled off his riding-boots with the spurs and took the girl who was apparently asleep.

She knew how to awaken in a charming manner and to look at the Czar with astonished and bewildered eyes.

He kissed the upper part of her arm in clumsy gallantry.

Gently he toyed with her Lettish blouse.

When he held her white breasts caressingly in his hands, he started back for the second time.

A small blood-red scar ran between them, as though it had been made by a sword.

"Katharina," asked Peter in a trembling voice, "who wounded you with a sword?"

"Years ago whilst I was sleeping a strange man came to the house of my parents on the sea-coast. Neighbors saw him leave the house. When I woke I found this scar upon my breast and it seemed to me as if pine-bark had fallen from me and left my body smooth and white. I had been a most hideous creature, a kind of tree-nymph, so they said and I had come out of a tree, had been born of a tree. But soon I was the most beautiful girl in all the country-side—ever since that stranger had given me that wound. He also left five hundred gold roubles behind, and with these my parents opened a small shop.

Peter drew a gold rouble with his image out of his pocket:

"Were the roubles like this one?"

Katharina regarded the goldpiece carefully.

"Yes, they were the very same."

"Keep the rouble, Katharina."

He looked deep into her eyes. He was overcome by a feeling such as he had never before experienced with any woman.

"Katharina, from this day on, you shall come and live in my palace—in an apartment that shall be all your own."

Katharina and the Czarina meet in a large columned corridor.

Katharina is dressed in the picturesque, varicolored costume of a Lettish peasant.

She falls upon her knees before the Czarina.

The Czarina taps her lightly upon the shoulder with her mother-of-pearl fan:

"Stand up, girl."

Katharina rises.

Two long blonde braids fall down upon her shoulders.

"What does the Czar see in you, girl? Red and healthy cheeks and a firm bosom. Thick blonde hair. Broad hips. What else?"

Katharina is silent.

"How often does the Czar come to see you?"

Katharina smiles:

"Once or twice every day, and then every night."

"Do you know that it lies in my power to have you put to death?"

"Yes, but it lies in the power of the Czar to have Your Majesty put to death."

The Czarina is silent.

"What dress are you wearing there?"

"The dress of a Lettish peasant. I am a peasant's daughter."

The Czarina lifts the embroidered hem with her pointed fingers:

"Very pretty, very gay. It suits the girl well. What costume thinkest thou, would suit me best?"

Katharina replies without thinking:

"The veil of a nun, Your Majesty."

The Czarina grows pale.

She drops the hem of the dress.

She goes.

Katharina drops on her knees.

"Menschikoff, Alexei is my son. My heart bleeds at the thought that I shall have to have

him put to death. He has a soul like a white swan. I have read his swan song. A poem: addressed to an unknown lady. But if I should allow him to live there will be no peace in Russia. All that are rebellious and dissatisfied gather about him. I believe that he is hand in glove with Golovin and that sometimes they meet in secret. If he should bring about my death, if he should succeed me as Czar, he would destroy all that I have built up with such toil and trouble. He would drive the Germans, the Frenchmen and the Italians out of the country, and raze Moscow to the ground. Knowst thou what he says of Moscow? That it should not be called the city of Czars, but the city of scars. Countless wounds have bled because of the city. He is a sentimental boy and plays the gusli most delightfully. But he would utterly destroy my work with his romances and his cantatas and blow it to nothing like the trumpets blew away the walls of Jericho."

Menschikoff tugged at his beard:

"It is the nature and the predestination of

sons to destroy the work of their fathers. The history of the world consists of contentions like that."

"Menschikoff, my son, don't chatter, don't philosophize! Leave that to Leibnitz and his like. By the way, has he not yet replied to my plan of establishing a Russian Academy of the Arts and Sciences? No? How are Lomonosoff's attempts at alchemy getting on? I need gold-money. The translation of legal, nautical, geographical and historical works into Russian proceeds apace far too slowly. I read one of them. It was written in a curly-cue sort of church Russian. Away with such! I want to hear the live and living Russian speech. Russia, Menschikoff, will live according to my idea—or she will not live."

Peter entered the room of the Czarevitch.

He was reading the Bible silently.

"What art thou reading, there?"

Alexei read, at first in a low tone of voice, then ever louder and more bitterly:

"O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence,

and thou wilt not save! Why doest thou show me iniquity and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are them that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth."

Peter growled:

"Nonsense. The weak are trodden underfoot and that is right. Why dost thou waste thy days with reading of the Bible and seekest ethical extenuation of thy weakness? I know that thou wilt destroy my work. Yet thou hast not the courage and strength to do what thou hast in mind. Why dost thou not draw a dagger against me like Golovin—thy friend?"

The Czarevitch bit his lips.

"I hate murder and war and fighting."

The Czar raised his eye-brows:

"Thou dost not hate all this as much as thou hatest me! But thou keepest thy hatred secret even unto thyself. I'll give thee an answer out of thy beloved Bible:

"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still:

and he which is filthy let him be filthy still. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

Blood mounted to the head of the Czar.

He went out without a farewell greeting.

A few days later a closed carriage drew up before a side portal of the palace.

The Czar, accompanied by the Patriarch Hadrian, entered the apartments of the Czarina.

"Jevdokia, wifie, they tell me that thou hast thoughts of taking the veil and of withdrawing to a cloister, far from all worldly trouble. What a praiseworthy idea! Hadrian, the highest bishop of our Church, will not be deprived of the pleasure of giving thee his conduct in person, and of blessing and anointing thee with his own hand. The cloister of Our Dear Lady, which is situated on Solowezki island is prepared and decorated, all ready to receive thee. The landscape there along the White Sea is quite pretty, only a little cold and monotonous

in the winter. Well, one can keep the fires going. You will not have to undergo excessive privations. The most Christian church is lenient. God bless your resolve. A gift for holy things has always slumbered in thee. Happy am I to be able to awaken it. Come."

The ladies-in-waiting, Feodorovna Schuvaloff and the Countess Elisabeth Stolberg, a German, sobbed.

The Czarina opened her beautiful dark eyes which she had kept closed during the entire speech of the Czar. She threw back her head like a thoroughbred horse and took the arm which the Patriarch offered her.

At the door she turned around once more:

"And Alexei, our son, the Czarevitch, what is to become of him?"

The Czar looked through the window upon the courtyard, where a band of soldiers were erecting a gallows:

"He is provided for, do not concern thyself about him."

"Moscow, the city of my ancestors, is growing too narrow for me. I'll make a stroke

through the entire past. The future begins today. I myself will build my own capital, my burg—Petersburg. I rode along the Neva. Thirty versts from its mouth, lies an island: there Petersburg shall rise. As a warning to the Swedes, as a monument to me. Fresini, the Italian architect, shall make me a plan, in the course of three days—no contradiction, Fresini! — Menschikoff shall superintend the construction—no contradiction, Menschikoff! Thou shalt drum the workmen together—or whip them together, if necessary. In a year Petersburg shall arise there—my burg, proud, steep, impregnable, washed by the waves of the Neva."

Menschikoff and Fresini bowed.

The audience was at an end.

Fresini sketched day and night. He dreamed of a kind of Northern Venice, a northern Palmyra; barbaric but majestic.

Menschikoff sent his agents into every province. The workmen were promised free bread and free fish and a wage of a rouble a month.

They came in droves: Russians, Ukrainians,

Kalmucks, Tartars: voluntarily and involuntarily.

Menschikoff required twenty thousand men for the preliminary work; the draining and damming. He had them assembled in fourteen days. They were forced to build their shelters themselves; damp earth caverns, tents through which the wind piped. They froze. They hungered. They cursed. The provision trains were attacked underway by errant bands of robbers, and plundered. There were not enough tools. Thousands were forced to dig the soil with their bare hands. The skin of their hands swelled, grew cracked and bled. The earth was transported in aprons, in coats, in sacks. The overseers swung knouts and whips.

Thousands perished.

They were flung into the Neva where their swollen bodies drove onward to the sea.

Day after day fresh swarms of bondmen arrived.

And finally hundreds of thousands dug and builded, piled brick and stone, spread mortar and rough cast.

Menschikoff had ordered a stone house with

a tower to be built for himself upon a hill in the middle of the island. They called it the Tower of Babel. Here he stood and looked down upon the swarming, wriggling masses.

The Swedes attempted to prevent the building of the city. They realized what a menace city and fortress would prove, once they stood there irrevocably.

General Löwengart marched from Viborg against the growing city of Petersburg.

Peter hurled himself against him at the head of a few regiments which he had hastily drummed together.

He did not flee as at Narva. How far Narva lay behind him!

He sought out the General himself and plunged his rapier into his breast.

The Swedes fled and left their artillery and stores behind them. He directed the Swedish cannon against the fleeing forces.

The workmen of Petersburg had a day of rest. There was a great festival of joy. All the workmen were drunk. Peter made them a present of the Swedish camp women and campboys that had remained behind. A dozen

men or more took possession of each blonde, fine-hipped woman.

Fresini had requested as a special favor that one of them called Ute, be given him as a present. She had been the concubine of the Swedish general. He made her his wife.

The next day the work of fortification went on. Bastions were erected upon Kotlie, one of the islets.

An enemy fleet appeared before Kotlie. It was overtaken by a storm and was forced to retreat with flapping sails, amidst the laughter of the Russians. Admiral Apraxin pursued them with a few galleys. But they had lost faith in themselves, after being thus roughly handled by the storm and fled, though greatly in the numerical superiority.

The buildings of Petersburg were still for the greater part wooden houses or sheds. The transportation of stone resulted in difficulties. Thereupon Peter decreed that every traveller that came by land way or water way to Petersburg should be compelled to pay duty in the shape of a number of building stones. Furthermore he commanded the richest families

of Russia, the princes, nobles and rich merchants to build stone houses of two stories in Vassili Ostroff, a part of St. Petersburg, no matter what the cost.

Barracks arose, store-houses, wharves, factories, hospitals, prospects of all sorts. Merchants came—from Nishni-Novgorod, from Germany, Poland, France, lured thither by promises of special privileges. Peter promised them immunity from taxes. An exchange was established. Tartars were settled there by force. The Senate was transferred from Moscow to St. Petersburg. A curiosity booth called a Museum, was Peter's special pride. The opening performance of the newly-founded Imperial Theatre was the "Hero of Kieff"—played with the clumsiest allusions to Peter himself, who saw his double in most deceptive disguise contentedly parading about the stage and accomplishing unbelievable and herculean deeds of prowess.

It is the year 1708.
Peter makes his entry into Petersburg.

A hundred thousand human beings lay dead in the swamps of the Neva, frozen or laid low by poisonous miasmic vapours. Ten thousand horses had perished: but Petersburg lived.

All the houses were decorated with green pine boughs.

Peter rode slowly upon his dapple-grey through the city—which a thought of his had conjured out of nothing. He rode bare-headed, in a grey robe, without a single trace of insignia, wearing tall black boots.

He wished to be a Russian—nothing more.

Katharina rode beside him: a Lettish peasant girl in a dress of all the colors of the rainbow, with red boots, blonde, beaming, fresh of face.

Behind him: Menschikoff in the gala uniform of a general and Fresini in a stylish Italian dress. Then the Patriarch under a canopy of blue velvet, in a golden church robe, holding a prayer-book close to his freckled face and murmuring prayers. Then swarms of high clergy and low, monks, lay brothers, followed. The end of the procession was brought up by

the regiment of guards with fifes, cymbals and a pair of kettle drums, beaten by a veritable negro.

Arriving in front of his palace, Peter sprang from his horse, knelt down and kissed the holy Russian earth, blessed by the Patriarch.

The entire people which stood in dense rows, knelt down, silent, sullen, humble.

Then the singing of the priesthood arose, the music of the dragoons, the tinkling of tiny bells. Incense fumed.

The Czar and Katharina rode through the central portal of the Winter Palace amid the cheers and cries of the people. The entourage followed through all sorts of side doors which were purposely built so low that no one could pass through them upright but was forced to bend the head humbly whenever the palace was entered.

A banquet in the palace.

Pirogge, a kind of fish dish, baked in a loaf, which reminds Menschikoff of his youth and is therefore hateful to him, is just being served,

when a courier comes bursting through the rows of servants and lackeys.

He brings a dispatch from Admiral Apraxin.

Charles of Sweden is marching against Petersburg. King Charles himself at the head of his troops!

Peter's eyes brighten.

He wipes his moustache, to which fish-bones are clinging, with the sleeve of his coat.

"We'll have a battle for dessert!"

"No interruption of the feast! Stay here, Katharina. Menschikoff, come with me. Musicians, play a dance!"

They play.

Peter seizes Katharina by the hips and turns her about in a dance until she is ready to faint.

Then he stops and with one bound is out of the banquet-hall.

The Swedes had pitched a fortified camp on the banks of the Neva.

Apraxin was of the belief that the main forces of the Swedes were collected here.

Peter did not permit himself to be duped. He observed that they had flung a pontoon-bridge over the Neva lower down and that column after column was crossing it.

Peter assembled several hundred dragoons and charged the Swedes, aiming to wrest the bridge-head from them.

In vain.

The attack is repulsed.

He achieves nothing.

The whole Swedish army marches like a long snake across the Neva.

Peter retreats. He and his horsemen begin to devastate the entire region. He burns down the homes of his subjects, fires their fields, deaf to their clamor, he lays low the fruit-trees, slaughters the cattle which he cannot take with him. The Swedes who, counting upon the rich booty in the conquered land, had provisioned themselves but scantily, encounter a dreadful desolation, smoking ruins, coal-black carcasses, black meadows. Their soldiers begin to feel hunger, to murmur, to rebel. Winter comes. Snow falls day and night. The Swedes crouch in the forests about Petersburg, like half froz-

en birds. Hundreds are killed by the peasants. The remainder, demoralized, flees back to the sea and embarks on waiting vessels of the fleet.

Charles of Sweden stands at the prow of his flag-ship, tears gleam in his lashes.

The barbaric laughter of Peter comes wafting to him through the snowstorm from the strand.

During Peter's stay in camp, Katharina wrote him this letter: "My all! My world! Greetings to thee! Kisses to thee! Embraces to thee! Mayst thou live a thousand years! Thou hast triumphed over the Swedes! O flag of defiance, O stronghold of pride, I pray for thee, at morning when the sun appears, at evening when it vanishes. My bed is orphaned at night. I stroke the pillows. Praise be to the Lord that he has proved His grace through thee. I was in the cloister of the Holy Sergius when thy letter came. I kissed the feet of the saint. Thou badest me in the event of thy victory, to give gifts to the cloisters. I did so. And went on foot to all the cloisters of the region. I had medals stamped with thy glorious likeness in memory of thy victory.

They are not yet finished, or I would send one with this letter. God knows how much this dove, this dovekin, yearns for her mate. My wings are lamed. Thou must teach me to fly again."

It was at Poltawa that Peter finally defeated the Swedes. The fur flew until they were almost naked.

But naked as they were, they fled through the Ukraine, towards Turkey. Though harried and half-dead, they nevertheless succeeded in inciting the Turks who had not forgotten Azoff, against the Czar and in hounding them upon him. Charles and the Grand Vizier assumed the command of the Osmanli forces.

Once again he brought the hated enemy to bay.

He succeeded in completely surrounding Peter on the banks of the Pruth. This time Katharina had accompanied her lord to the field.

Three furious attacks of the Janissaries were repelled with difficulty.

Peter's fate seem sealed.

From his encampment he heard the enemy already celebrating the victory they were wresting from him.

For the first time in his life, he too lost heart and became despondent.

Wrapped in his sheepskin coat, he sat upon a broken drum, and stared gloomily into the smouldering watch-fire.

He had lived too wildly, had desired too much; he had climbed too steeply up the height of power.

And now his powers were failing him, just before reaching the summit. He was weary, weary unto death. He longed to sleep, to sleep forever—nothing more.

Something came creeping along the way.

Was it a wild-cat?

It was Katharina. She stood still before him, smiled and said: "Courage!"

He snatched her to him. And then he felt that she was naked under her mantle.

Katharina sent an envoy with a flag of truce to the Grand-Vizier and asked him to grant her a private audience.

The Grand Vizier received her with consummate courtesy.

It was morning before she came riding back. When the sentry demanded the pass-word, she cried:

"Victory!"

She placed herself at the head of the troops opposed to the enemy's left wing, commanded by Charles of Sweden. These troops were intended to break through the lines. Her loose blonde hair fluttered in the wind like a golden flag. She carried herself before them like an ikon—garish, brilliant, and luminous. She swept the ragged, the hungry, the faint-hearted along with her. They broke through the enemy's lines.

The right wing, which was commanded by the Grand Vizier, remained inactive at the beginning, and joined in only after the breakthrough had succeeded.

In fourteen days Charles of Sweden galloped from the Pruth to the Baltic, accompanied by only a small cavalcade. He prepared for a new campaign—then the fatal bullet laid him low upon the ramparts of Frederiksborg.

When Peter heard of his death, he crossed himself reverently thrice.

The Treaty of Nystadt secured all his conquests to Peter: Livonia, Esthonia, Ingria, Karelia passed into the hands of Russia. Poland was weakened so greatly that she dared venture no protest when Russia usurped pieces of booty that had been promised to her.

Sweden was demolished. Denmark gave her the death-blow.

Poland fell to pieces and rotted away, eaten up by intestine strife, Persia no less.

The power of the Turks was broken. The Ukraine fell into Peter's lap like a ripe apple.

Upright stood the Russian bear and licked the blood from his snout and paws. He was beginning to squint towards India, and toward China.

The Senate begged Peter to assume the rank of an emperor,—a title which had not been in use in the East since the fall of Byzantium.

During the celebration of the great victory Peter danced upon the table like a child.

Tears of joy filled his eyes. He laughed and howled like one demented.

He kissed Katharina,—to whom he was married on the same day. The Patriarch Hadrian who had refused to perform the marriage ceremony, was autocratically deposed from office. In honor of Katharina he founded the order of the Holy St. Katharine.

With his own hands he hung the silver cross around her neck on the bridal night. On one side it bore the likeness of the Saint—who resembled Katharina like one twin sister another. The obverse showed an eagle's nest with two eagles that held serpents in their beaks.

When she had fallen asleep, he left her.

He went out into the night.

He felt the need of being alone.

He mounted his horse and rode into the dark. No star showed in the heavens. And he rode the way which he had already once ridden in a dream, until standing upon a sand-dune, he saw the Baltic before him.

The salt wind combed his beard. The ocean broke at his feet. He bridled his horse which

stood like iron in the storm and in the foam of the combers that spat up at him.

Peter shouted, shouted louder than the billows and the storm and the thunder of the spheres:

"Ours is the sea, the Baltic Sea, the White Sea! Ours is the South Sea, the Black Sea, ours the Caspian Sea, the Eastern Sea, Ours!"

Then he sprang from his horse, buried his face in the mane of his horse and wept spasmodically, and uncontrolled, like a child.

On the day following he wrote his ambassador at Paris:

"Most pupils are done with their schooling at the end of seven years. My own schooling has taken thrice as long. But, God be praised, it has come to a good end, nor could I wish for a better one."

Peter, dirty and unpresentable, enters the *Kabàk,* the tavern. His red boots are plastered with clay. His hair is claggy and unkempt. His glances, timid as ants, crawl over the sand strewn floor. In a low voice he orders the host to bring a hundred roubles worth of

wine. But mine host, with hands thrust deeply into his wide pantaloons, merely laughs.

Peter curses.

His glances fly up from the earth like devils out of a chest.

Topers with broad backsides, sailors, peasants, dock laborers, are seated in the smoky corner around an open fire.

Peter goes and sits down with them.

"Who'll give me something to guzzle? I've a thirst on me like a horse that's swallowed a hundredweight of oats."

The fellows belch and chuckle. One shouts to the host:

"Little Father! a glass for our friend!"

They tope and sing.

Peter sings:

"I am Peter, the son of the peasant Ivan.
My mother was the steppe.
I carry a falcon on my shoulders.
A red nightingale sings in the cage of my heart.
With my arrows I shot down the golden balls on the steeples of the cathedral of Kieff.

Look upon the round golden buttons of my waistcoat, they are the balls from the steeples of Kieff.

The race of the slinking snakes is subject to me.

When I whistle they dance.

Do you know who loved the Princess Nastasia?

The white man?

Do you know who slew the giant Tugarin?

The grey hound?

Betwixt early matins and high-mass I rode from Moscow to Kieff.

Upon my fallow stallion, my fallow stallion Sokol.

I am the last upon the battle field.

The first among the merry girls."

Thus sang Peter.

The topers hearkened in silence.

One that smelt of tar, said:

"Whence comst thou, Fatherkin? Across land? Across sea?"

Peter drank a deep draught:

"I have come over the White Sea in my ship Sokol. Her sides are the flanks of an auerochs,

her power that of a steer, her speed that of a greyhound. She has eyes at her prow like eagle's eyes. Her eyebrows are of black sable. This vessel foams through the thousand seas and she casts anchor only where there is a golden landing-stage."

The topers were astounded. And an old wight, with scarcely a tooth left in his mouth, murmured:

"But how didst thou land in Petersburg? Has Petersburg a golden landing-stage?"

Peter said: "Last night—did ye not see how the heavens were all of gold? A golden bridge spanned itself from heaven to earth. I cast anchor at that bridge."

The topers were silent. They drained their glasses, looked at him with large eyes and went away. One after the other they went away.

The last one whispered to the host:

"He is a wonderful man. One must love him or hate him. He seems not to be of this world. It is best to leave him alone. Give him some drink, Fatherkin."

Peter sat at the chimney-fire and warmed his hands.

A white he-cat leaped upon the table and stared at him.

The tavern-keeper placed a fresh glass of steaming punch in front of Peter.

He remained standing before him in embarrassment and blinked with his eyes.

"What is it, Fatherkin?"

And the tavern-keeper said softly:

"When thou boardest thy ship Sokol once again and settest sail from the golden bridge for that land which lies along the blue seas of heaven, then take greetings to my daughter, my little daughter, slender as a doe. She stayed with me only fifteen years. And then a wild man came and loved her to death. It is now again fifteen years that she has been wandering on those meadows in the sky. Give her this little chain, and bid her wear it about her neck, there is a little bell fastened to it. Then when she goes about, I shall hear it faintly twinkling."

Peter leaped from his seat and embraced the fat shy man, down whose round cheeks the tears were streaming.

"I shall do as thou wish'st, dear brother."

After Peter had drunk up all his money, he drank up his boots, his blouse, his pantaloons and his shirt. Naked he went stamping back to his palace.

The summer had been very cold. It had not really been summer at all. It rained at least several hours every day and at night one shivered under the thin summer blankets, for the heavy feather-beds must not leave the linen cupboard before October. Only one warm night was still granted to Peter. This night glowed like a sun-flower in the dark. It was the night of the summer solstice. The people leaped over the fires lighted during this festival. The fires flung their flickering light over the distant sea, and thousands of sparks up to the very stars. Thence they fell to earth again in the shape of fiery scales cast from the eyes of the stars.

"What do you wish yourself?" asked Ute, the Swedish woman, as she held Peter by the hand: "when there are falling stars, then you must make a wish. For the wish will be fulfilled."

He was a little frightened at this question and could not answer.

The festival-fires of the summer solstice darkened.

The cut branches of the fir-trees blackened with soot.

He no longer cherished a wish. The more he thought of it, the better he knew that he no longer had a wish. God was his witness, he had grown old. The fires had burned low. They only smouldered now. That he no longer had any wish must surely be regarded as a sign of his growing old. The other day as he stood in front of a mirror—had he not discovered a number of white hairs and a bald spot upon his head? Sometimes at night just before going to bed—did he not feel a slight trembling of the knees?"

He was stranded.

The waves were breaking about the wreck that was himself.

"By merry!" said Ute, "what ails thee?"

"Thou ailest me," and he drew her to the side and into a dark garden. She leaned against a tree and he embraced her. But,

strange!—he felt the bark of the tree more than the young woman who was glowing against him like some Venus out of heaven. He could not but think of the tree! what kind of a tree might it be? A tree, such as Katharina had been, ere he had struck her with his sword and made a human being of her? He reached up into the branches. He felt a rounded fruit. It was an apple-tree. He tore the unripe fruit from the bough and bit in the sweetly-sour meat of it: Autumn and spring have been given me once more. God, I thank thee. I thank thee for this life. Perhaps it will soon be over. What odds? It was lovely and terrible. It was full of pain, full of care, full of need and disgust. But it was also full of happiness and glory, so full of happiness that my heart leaps and hops like a dancer when I think thereon. It was well, God. Thou grantest me once more to feel autumn and spring and thou, Pomona, golden goddess! This tree here: it ripens. And this young creature here: she blossoms. She blossoms like an apple-tree in spring-time: white and rose-red.

"Of what thinkest thou?" asked Ute. "Thou shouldst not think! I shall be jealous of thy thoughts."

Yes, he thought too much. That was a devilish business. She was right. It was an evil sign. He began to think. He was growing old. The summer was past. The scabious, the balsam, the asters are withered. But the yellow amaryllis, the symbol of stubbornness, has remained. I will not let myself be downed. Even though the pansy, the symbol of deceit, flowers in the eyes of this beautiful thing, what odds? Belladonna: beautiful lady, that is the name of the most poisonous of all flowers . . . but daffodils at my feet—you mean truth to me and eternity. Your seed ripens only in the coming spring. Daffodils, after my own heart!

Ute grew impatient. She threw her arms about his neck. He kissed her soft lips. And thinking of old Virgil: *Phyllis amat corylos:* Phyllis loves hazel-nuts—he drew her into the shelter of a hazel-nut bush which grew at the edge of the garden which for hundreds of years had served lovers as a place of tender

communion. As he bent the branches of the bush aside, the dried hazel-nuts clashed like little bells.

Winter came and spring and summer and then winter once more.

Peter returned from an inspection of the Olonezian iron-works, and the salt-works at Staraia-Russ. He had also planned to visit the iron-forge and the gun-factory at Lysterbek. At Lachta he saved a boy from death by drowning. Fever seized and shook him the very same day. He returned post-haste to Moscow.

Peter writhed in pain. These accursed pains in the kidneys! This burning in the belly, as though torches had been lighted inside! And the bladder, too, refused to work. "God in Heaven, I praised thee too soon during the festival of the summer solstice. A gentle, a mild, a honey-sweet kind of God art Thou: Thou hast blasted us with pestilence and the French sickness and carest not a whit as to what becomes of those that thou hast set into the world. Hey! was I not ever a strong

wolf, a bear, that crushed the girls in his paws and ate glass like groats? And what am I now? Who would have thought that the bite of that little rat Ute was poisonous? I am helpless as a mole by day and twist and turn like a worm. Why didst thou conceal in the jungle of joy the viper of that malady which ought not to be called the French sickness but the sickness of God? How can we blame the wretched French for it? But Thee we can blame. Thou hast consented that it pierce me in the heel. Thou sittest as nameless and as heartless as the hero of Kieff, up on Thy throne of lapis lazuli, and art like a diamond, clear and shining and transparent.

"I am disconsolate. I know, my friends, that you have sent a delegation to Boerhaave at Leyden. But he will come too late. I cannot help myself. How then can another help me?

"Fetch mine enemy, Golovin the monk"——

They brought him.

Potapoff met him on the lower floor. He crossed himself. The end was coming. The

strange pilgrim was coming to fetch home the hero of Kieff. He took the hero's sword out of his hand, the sword that he had once brought him to do battle against the brood of serpents and dragons. He had wielded it with renown —as erstwhile Gabriel his sword of flame against Lucifer. But, oh, the serpents and dragons were far too many. If you struck off the head of one dragon, two would grow in its place. If you cut a snake in twain, then each part became a new snake.

The monk bowed low before Peter.

Katharina and Menschikoff like two archangels stood beside Peter's couch.

Peter groaned:

"Sit down upon my bed. Things are going ill with me. I would make confession. Give me absolution and your blessing. Hear my confession. Five words, brother: it was all in vain. They are already plucking at the woof to loosen the threads. All that I built is falling to pieces like a house of cards. I made Russia great, but Russians cannot bear greatness in any form. Once the cry went: Russia lies remote in Asia, her people are brutal, her

roads impassable; there is no profit in trading with her. And now? The world is eager for our products. The posts that I established are ever filled. We are respected in Europe and in the world. But little they care for honor and respect, so long as they have enough to feed on. All that I taught them they hasten to forget. I have built schools, high schools and low schools, schools for scholars, and schools for artisans; but they pass in on the one side and out at the other as though nothing had occurred. They have learned to read, yet they have remained illiterate.

"What has become of the serfs to whom I gave freedom? They knew not what to do with their freedom, they sold themselves into bondage again and drank up the price of their freedom. Who can avail against God and Novgorod? I have had ministers and generals hanged. But the ministers and generals still steal and allow themselves to be bribed. Even Menschikoff, the boy of my heart, has lied to me, has cheated me and thieved from me. Why didst thou persuade me so ungently and so plausibly against the conquest of Swedish-

Pomerania that time, my son,—when I might have become a Prince of the German Reich with a seat and a voice in the German Reichstag? Because thou wast bribed with twenty thousand ducats by mine enemies. Be still, Menschikoff—I speak the truth. But am I to have thee hanged, too, being as I am upon my death-bed? I haven't the heart to do it because I love thee, even though that be foolishness on my part.

"I thought that culture, which had gone from Greece to Italy, from Italy to France, from France to Germany would also come to Russia, and that I might smooth the way for her. That is why I summoned the Germans, the French, the Italians to our country. They were to help me. But my people hated the strangers because they knew more than we and because we were supposed to learn from them. We hated them as the stupid schoolboy of the hedge-school hates the school-master. They said I expected too much —of myself and of the others. Monk, good monk, I ought not to have knocked that dagger out of thy hand that day in the park of

Preobrashensk. Perhaps it had been better for all of us."

Peter fell back into the pillows. He groaned:

"Behold in me the whole misery of the creature man!"

The monk murmured prayers in Latin.

Peter lifted himself once more in bed: "Monk, take off your cassock."

The monk stood up and slipped it off in silence.

Katharina saw his brown back. This monk pleased her. She would think of him now and then.

"Where is the knout, my Czar?" asked the monk. "Strike!"

Peter shook his head and smiled:

"Help me into the cassock of the monk!"

Then they knew that his last hours had come. For ever since Czars have reigned they have been carried to the grave as simple, pious pilgrims, clad in the habit of a friar.

Menschikoff and Katharina helped him to don the cassock. He sighed.

"Menschikoff—paper and pen and ink. Sit

here: write down my testament. Or let the monk write it. Art thou ready, Monk?"

"I am ready."

Peter struggled for words:

"I will——"

He fell back dead.

Katharina, Menschikoff and the monk, knelt down and prayed.

The monk stood up. He turned to go. Then he noticed that he wore no gown. He looked about him. The coat of the Czar lay upon a chair at the foot of the bed. He donned this coat.

As he went stalking through the palace, the nobles came running towards him from all sides.

"How goes it, Little Father?"

The monk lifted his arm upright into the air.

"It is finished."

Then they observed that he was wearing the coat of the Czar.

A number of them came bearing up against him with drawn rapiers.

"Thou art wearing his coat, so he must have given in to thee, his bitterest enemy. It is his will. Be thou our Czar, Holy Father, Czar and Patriarch. Our land has no Czar, our Church no Patriarch any more."

The monk recoiled. A hectic flash overshot his brows. So it had come—the temptation of the world. The Tempter came up to him in the shape of that limping nobleman with the crooked eyes behind the bushy brows. The Tempter spake: "Thou wearest the garment of the Czar, here is the sword of the Czar. Take it and the empire of the world is thine. Let us do homage to thee master."

The monk clutched the crucifix of ivory that hung from his neck. And then he tore off the coat of the Czar. The limping noble pounced upon it as Potiphar's wife once pounced upon Joseph's coat. The monk fled with averted face.

They stared after him in confusion—then Katharina, clad in a high-necked dress of black velvet, came slowly striding down the

corridor. Menschikoff followed her. She stood still.

"His Majesty the Czar, God's Key-bearer and Chamberlain, has just entered into the Lord after receiving the holy sacrament for the dying. I pray the gentlemen of the nobility, of the senate and of the priesthood to await me in the audience-room."

Menschikoff at once ordered all the exits of the palace and the most important points of the city to be occupied by the guards who were all loyal to him.

Katharina stood before the throne. Menschikoff stood beside her. He held a parchment in his hand and read with a brazen and hammering voice:

"This is my last, unbreakable wish and will: I will that my beloved wife Katharina assume all rights and duties as Czarina and ruler over all the Russians.

"Signed Peter I. in the City Palace of Moscow during the night from the 7th to the 8th of February 1725, new style."

Menschikoff, as the highest magnate, knelt

and handed her the orb, the sceptre and the crown. She raised the crown herself and set it upon her blonde head.

The swords of the nobles flew out of their sheathes, the Senate waved its caps, the priests lifted their hands in blessing:

"Long live Katharina, our all-gracious Czarina and mistress."

In the background, in the midst of the priesthood, in a gown which he had borrowed from a gardener, stood Golovin, the monk. His temples throbbed. That woman up there on the throne—was it not she of whom the prophecy had been made—the great Whore of Babylon? With whom the kings of the Earth had whored and had become drunk with the wine of her harlotry. Woe! Destruction is upon us all.

Katharina recognized him. She motioned him to her.

"This is the pious father who received the confession of our Czar and took down his last will. Is it not so, Holy Father?"

The monk stared horror-stricken upon Kath-

arina's beauty and murmured brokenly—like an all too fragile vessel of glass—unresistingly:

"It is so——"

"It was the wish of the Czar that he should assume the Patriarchate of our Holy Church, which has been so long vacant. Long live Golovin, the Archimandrate and Metropolitan of Moscow!"

And again the swords clashed:

"Long may he live!"

Menschikoff had stepped up to a window. He looked down upon the Red Place where standing silent and stolid, the people were awaiting the proclamation of a new Czar.

As the coffin-bearers were lifting the casket down the broad stone steps, they slipped and fell upon the ice that had formed upon these. The coffin slipped from their grasp, fell upon the edge of a step, broke open and the corpse of Peter, already blue and bloated, rolled down the entire flight. There at the bottom it lay still, face down, the fists, clenched in the rigor of death, rooted in the earth and even in

death clutching the beloved and the hated earth.

The people packed the cathedral.

The choir-boys grouped themselves in front of the wall of ikons with the three doors. Behind the wall of ikons seven priests read the Death Mass for the Czar.

Tiny bells tinkled.

The four evangels were carried among the people amidst the shine of candles.

Then the Passion, the great mystagogy, pursued its course behind closed doors: life, sorrow, death, the Resurrection of the Lord.

Incense smoked. Bells pealed. Torches flamed.

Golovin, the new Patriarch, carried the Body of Christ present in the Sacrament, through the center portal out into the porch and revealed it to the people.

They fell upon their knees.

He raised the Sacrament still higher, desperately—still higher.

Why were not his fingers scorched that ven-

tured to touch it? Why did not some thunderbolt blast that insolent and lifted forehead? Why did not the earth open to swallow him up—him the traitor to the holy word and the holy deed? Had he not once sworn to exterminate the accursed czaristic work to the very roots, like the house of Ahab and Jezebel? Had he not robbed sacred churches of their worldly treasures, their gems and pearls, had he not purloined churchly vessels of gold and silver and ordered them to be melted up in order to have means to carry on the battle against the Anti-Christ? Woe to him! Did not some whirlwind fling those vows into his ears that he had once vowed? Why did not the tower of the cathedral fall and shatter him as with a fist of stone? Were lies alone triumphant in the world, force, lust, horrors and deeds of shame?

Fainting, Golovin the Patriarch collapsed in the midst of the sacred sacrifice.

When Golovin awoke, he found himself in the bed-room of the Czarina.

He lay upon a couch spread with a silken

coverlet. The Czarina, clad in a scarlet housegown, deeply cut out at the neck, was bending over him. A sweet scent arose from between her breasts—it intoxicated him. She held a golden beaker in her hand, full of wine which she offered to him.

He stared at her.

And he thought of the divine prophecy:

"The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup. . . ."

Between her breasts, upon a chain of ivory, hung the Crucified one.

He raised himself and kissed the crucifix, until suddenly his lips turned aside and clung burning to Katharina's breast.

It was night.

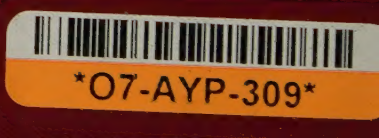
Golovin, drunk with the wine of love, staggered back to the Cathedral.

There black in the garish moonlight stood the sarcophagus of the Czar. He tore the funeral cloth from the coffin, threw himself upon it, clawed it with his hands, sank his teeth

into the solid ashwood, as though he would tear it open.

"Arise! anointed one! Come back! Help us! Let the Nagaika hiss through the air. It is still too mild by far for us sons of dogs. We have misprized thee and misjudged thee. Forgive us. I am Abbadon, the angel out of the depths. Smoke and sulphur rush from our mouths. We are damned to all eternity."

THE END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